STUDY OF THE SINGING TECHNIQUE OF "SHANQU SONG OF SHANXI FOLKSONG" BY SHI ZHANMING

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to: (1) investigate the current status of Shanqu and (2) analyze the singing techniques of Shi Zhanming.

This study employed qualitative research methods, including literature review, field investigation, interview data, performance observation, and case study analysis. Documentary sources on Shanxi folk-song culture, Shanqu transmission, vocal technique, and intangible cultural heritage were reviewed to establish the analytical framework. Selected performance materials associated with Shi Zhanming, especially *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You*, were used as the principal case for technical analysis.

The findings show that the current status of Shanqu is characterized by both continuity and transformation. Its transmission has shifted from primarily oral and community-based practice to hybrid forms supported by schools, cultural institutions, festivals, heritage programs, and digital media. Performance contexts have moved from everyday functional settings toward staged, educational, and mediated presentation. Although traditional environments have weakened, Shanqu continues to preserve recognizable musical and cultural identity through dialect, vocal style, melodic character, and regional expressive memory. At the same time, challenges remain, especially the weakening of natural transmission, aging practitioners, reduced dialect use, and the growing distance between contemporary audiences and former participatory contexts.

The analysis of Shi Zhanming's singing techniques demonstrates an integrated vocal system in which vocal production and resonance, breath control, pitch accuracy and register coordination, diction and expressive delivery, emotional expression and vocal ornamentation, and falsetto and modal voice transition function together. His singing preserves the bright, penetrating, and emotionally direct qualities associated with Shanqu while also showing disciplined technical control suitable for contemporary performance and pedagogy. The study concludes that the sustainability of Shanqu depends not only on preservation policy and documentation, but also on the continued transmission of style in actual performance. In this sense, Shi Zhanming's singing provides an important model for understanding how technical practice can function as a mechanism of cultural inheritance.

Keywords: Shanqu, Shanxi Folk Songs, Singing Techniques, Shi Zhanming, Cultural Transmission

_____Major Advisor

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Chinese folk songs represent an important component of traditional Chinese culture and historical memory. As forms of oral literature and musical expression created and transmitted among ordinary people, folk songs reflect social life, labor practices, beliefs, customs, emotions, and regional identity across different historical periods. Early Chinese folk songs can be traced back to the pre-Qin period, particularly through *Shijing* (*The Book of Songs*) and ancient ballads, which are regarded as the origins of Chinese folk poetry and folk musical culture (Wang, 2012). Folk songs documented the voices and experiences of common people and reflected labor activities, ritual practices, emotional expression, and daily life within ancient Chinese society (A Historical Research of Chinese Folk Songs, 2023). Therefore, Chinese folk songs are not only artistic expressions but also important carriers of cultural heritage and collective memory.

Among the many regional traditions of Chinese folk music, Shanxi folk songs occupy an important position because of their long historical development, distinctive musical characteristics, and rich cultural meanings. Shanxi Province, located on the eastern side of the Loess Plateau and within the middle reaches of the Yellow River, possesses a complex geographical environment consisting of mountains, valleys, plateaus, and plains (Li & Pattananon, 2023). This geographical environment has significantly influenced local lifestyles and artistic expression, resulting in a folk singing tradition characterized by bright vocal timbre, free melodic expression, strong emotional projection, and natural simplicity. Shanxi folk songs are often described as sincere, high-pitched, and emotionally expressive, reflecting both the natural landscape and the personalities of local people (Herong & Pattananon, 2023).

Historically, Shanxi folk songs emerged from the everyday lives of ordinary people and were closely connected with labor, festivals, rituals, weddings, and social communication. Similar to many traditional Chinese folk music forms, Shanxi folk songs have been transmitted mainly through oral tradition and collective participation across generations (Quanbing & Sopolpong, 2023). Their musical structures commonly employ pentatonic scales, wave-like melodic contours, and flexible rhythmic patterns, while singers frequently utilize expressive ornamentation and improvisational techniques during performance (Caiqin, 2022). Furthermore, Shanxi folk songs preserve local dialect pronunciation and linguistic characteristics, which strengthen their authenticity and regional identity (Wang & Thotham, 2025).

Among the representative forms of Shanxi folk songs, *Shanqu* plays a particularly significant role within regional folk singing culture. The melodies of Shanqu are commonly characterized by loud, bright, and resonant vocal qualities that require singers to possess strong breath support and vocal projection (Yulin Xiao Qu, 2025). The lyrical content of Shanqu frequently focuses on themes of labor, love, homesickness, local customs, and emotional expression, illustrating the close relationship between music and daily social life. In addition, the improvisational nature of folk singing allows performers to adapt melodies, lyrics, and rhythms according to different emotional and performance situations, demonstrating the dynamic and living nature of folk music traditions.

In contemporary society, however, the preservation and transmission of traditional folk songs face increasing challenges. Rapid modernization, urbanization, technological advancement, and the growing influence of popular culture have significantly transformed traditional lifestyles and cultural environments. Research on folk song transmission has indicated that younger generations are gradually losing interest in traditional folk music, while many folk song inheritors are aging, resulting in weakened systems of oral transmission (Zhang, Kaewkulthorn, & Punvaratorn, 2025). In addition, modern entertainment media and changing cultural consumption patterns have reduced opportunities for traditional folk singing practices within local communities (Zhang,

2024). Consequently, preserving and revitalizing traditional folk singing culture has become an important issue in contemporary Chinese music studies and cultural heritage research.

As a result, scholars and educational institutions have increasingly emphasized the importance of folk song preservation, music education, and cultural transmission. Previous studies have examined the historical development of Shanxi folk songs, teaching methods, conservation models, educational guidebooks, and cultural inheritance strategies (Caiqin, 2022, Junwei and Srisombut, 2025, Herong and Pattananon, 2023). Other studies have explored the integration of modern technology and educational systems into the preservation and dissemination of Chinese folk songs (Zhang, 2024). However, most existing research primarily focuses on cultural preservation, educational development, historical background, and general musical characteristics.

Despite the growing body of research on Chinese folk songs and Shanxi folk music, there remains a significant research gap regarding the systematic analysis of singing techniques in actual folk song performance practice. Previous studies rarely provide detailed examinations of vocal production, breath control, resonance placement, pitch coordination, register transition, ornamentation, and expressive interpretation used by representative Shanqu performers. In particular, existing literature tends to discuss folk songs from broader cultural or educational perspectives, while insufficient attention has been given to the relationship between specific vocal techniques and the preservation of regional musical identity. Furthermore, there is still limited research focusing specifically on Shi Zhanming as a representative contemporary performer of Shanqu singing, despite his important role in preserving and disseminating Shanxi folk song traditions through modern performance contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the current status of Shanqu and analyze the singing techniques of Shi Zhanming as a representative performer of contemporary Shanxi folk-song tradition. By integrating perspectives from ethnomusicology, vocal pedagogy, cultural heritage studies, and performance analysis, this research explains how Shi Zhanming’s singing techniques reflect the musical identity of Shanqu and

contribute to the inheritance and dissemination of traditional folk singing culture in contemporary society.

1.2 Research Objectives

1.2.1 To investigate the current status of Shanqu in contemporary society

1.2.2 To analyze the singing techniques of Shanqu as demonstrated by Shi Zhanming

1.3 Research Questions

1.3.1 What is the current status of Shanqu in contemporary society?

1.3.2 What singing techniques of Shanqu are demonstrated by Shi Zhanming?

1.4 Research Benefits

1.4.1 This study contributes to musicology and ethnomusicology by providing a focused analysis of Shanqu through both cultural-status investigation and performance-based vocal analysis.

1.4.2 The findings expand knowledge of Shanqu in relation to transmission, performance context, continuity, and adaptation in contemporary society.

1.4.3 The study supports the preservation and transmission of Shanqu by documenting and analyzing representative singing practices associated with Shi Zhanming.

1.5 Definition of Terms

1.5.1 Shanqu refers to a traditional folk-song genre of Shanxi Province, China, characterized by a high-pitched melodic style, strong vocal projection, dialect-based

lyrics, and close relationships with local social and cultural contexts. In this study, Shanqu refers specifically to its current status in terms of transmission, performance contexts, continuity, adaptation, and related challenges in contemporary society.

1.5.2 Singing techniques refer to the coordinated vocal methods used in performing Shanqu, including vocal production and resonance, breath control, pitch accuracy and register coordination, diction and expressive delivery, emotional expression and vocal ornamentation, and falsetto–modal voice transition. In this study, singing techniques are analyzed as integrated performance elements that reflect both artistic expression and the stylistic identity of Shanqu.

1.5.3 Shi Zhanming's singing techniques refer to the distinctive vocal practices demonstrated by Shi Zhanming in performing Shanqu. In this study, these techniques are examined through selected performance materials in order to analyze how vocal production and resonance, breath control, pitch accuracy and register coordination, diction and expressive delivery, emotional expression and vocal ornamentation, and falsetto–modal voice transition contribute to the preservation and contemporary presentation of Shanqu.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

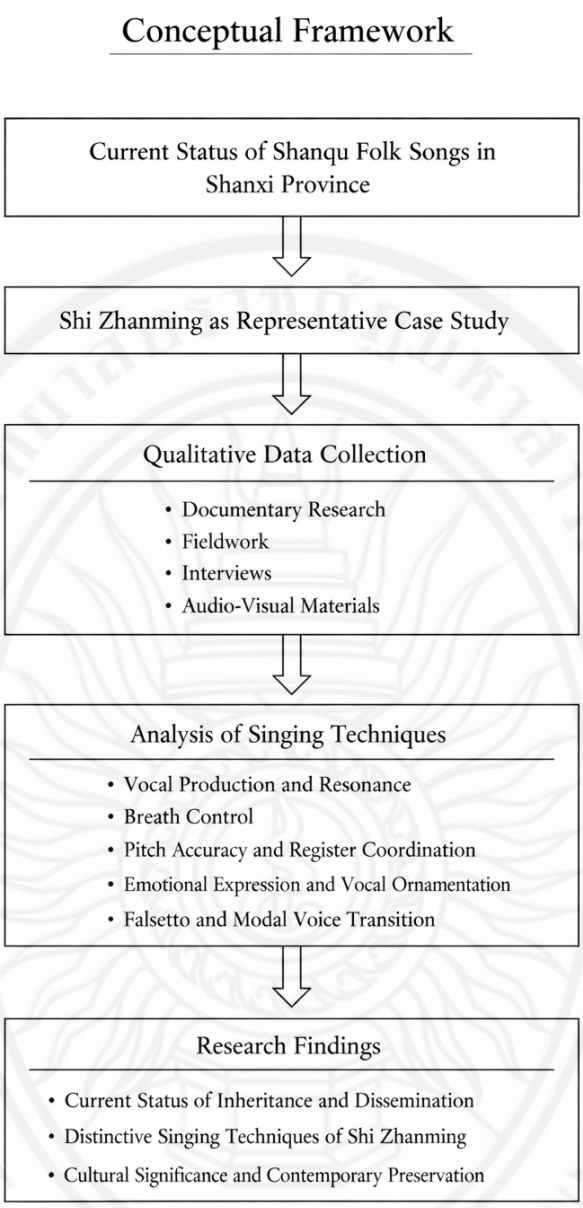


Figure 1.1 illustrates the conceptual framework guiding this study.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews existing literature on the characteristics of Shanxi folk songs, organized around five core topics and objectives. Through this review, the researchers aim to identify theoretical foundations, research gaps, and key insights that inform the current study.

2.1 General Knowledge of Shanxi Folk Songs

Shanxi folk songs, with a history of over 2,000 years, are an important part of China's folk music heritage. According to the "History of Chinese Folk Music" (Li, 2010), Shanxi folk songs can be divided into three main categories based on their content and style: Shanqu (mountain songs), Diaoqu (tune songs), and Cao Ge (grass songs). Among them, Shanqu is the most representative, originating from the mountainous areas of northern Shanxi, where residents used songs to communicate while herding, farming, or traveling across mountains.

Scholars have noted that Shanxi folk songs, especially Shanqu, have distinct regional characteristics. Wang (2015) pointed out in "Shanxi Folk Songs: Culture and Art" that Shanqu's high - pitched melodies and bold rhythms are a reflection of the Loess Plateau's vast and rugged landscape-residents needed to sing loudly to convey messages across mountains, which shaped the song's "wild" and "powerful" style. In terms of lyrics, Shanqu often uses colloquial language and vivid metaphors, such as comparing love to "peach blossoms" or "cucumbers blooming," which directly reflects local life (Zhang, 2018).

In recent years, with the emphasis on intangible cultural heritage protection, research on Shanxi folk songs has increased. Li (2020) studied the inheritance of Left -

Quan Flower - Blossoming Tune, noting that the number of inheritors has grown from 12 in 2010 to 70 in 2023, but the problem of "aging inheritors" still exists. However, most of these studies focus on cultural connotations or inheritance policies, with little attention to the singing techniques of key artists like Shi Zhanming.

In addition, recent studies have emphasized the relationship between ecological environment and vocal style formation. The harsh geographical conditions of the Loess Plateau-characterized by vast open spaces and mountainous terrain-have directly influenced the development of Shanqu's high-pitched and penetrating vocal style. This phenomenon can be understood through the concept of "environmental acoustics," which suggests that vocal techniques evolve in response to spatial and environmental demands.

Furthermore, the social function of Shanqu has gradually shifted from a practical communication tool in agricultural life to a symbolic cultural expression in modern society. In traditional contexts, Shanqu served as a means of long-distance communication and emotional expression during labor activities. In contrast, contemporary Shanqu is more commonly performed in staged settings, cultural festivals, and media platforms. This transformation reflects a broader transition from functional music to representational music, highlighting the changing role of folk traditions in modern cultural systems.

From a historical perspective, Shanxi folk songs developed in close connection with the long cultural history of the Yellow River basin. Shanxi has often been regarded as one of the important cradles of northern Chinese civilization, and many scholars trace the roots of its singing traditions to very early oral practices connected with labor, ritual, courtship, and seasonal activities. Because the province occupies a strategic position between the Loess Plateau, mountain ranges, and river valleys, its folk songs preserve both agricultural and frontier cultural features. This long historical accumulation helps explain why Shanxi folk songs display strong continuity while also showing clear local variation from one region to another (Zhou & Hou, 2022; Mei, 2021).

In terms of classification, Shanxi folk songs are usually understood as a large category that includes mountain songs, labor songs, minor tunes, yangge-related songs,

and narrative or custom-based songs. Among these forms, mountain-song traditions are especially important because they reveal the relationship between voice, landscape, and daily life. In northwestern Shanxi, the genre known as *shanqu* became one of the most representative local forms. It is widely associated with areas such as Hequ and nearby regions, where singing was historically linked with migration, herding, travel, and emotional exchange across long distances. In central and southeastern areas, other local forms such as *kaihua diao* and regionally distinctive minor songs developed in response to different linguistic, social, and musical environments (Shanxi Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage List, n.d., Zhou and Hou, 2022).

The geographical environment of Shanxi has had a direct influence on vocal style. Much of the province is characterized by plateau landscapes, dry climate, open terrain, and mountainous routes. Under such conditions, singers historically needed a tone that could travel far and remain clear in outdoor settings. As a result, many Shanxi folk songs employ bright timbre, strong projection, and wide melodic movement. This vocal quality is not only an artistic choice but also an adaptation to environment. The terrain encouraged extended calls, long melodic arcs, and forceful high-register expression, all of which later became recognizable aesthetic features of regional folk singing (Mei, 2021, Caiqin, 2022).

Musically, Shanxi folk songs are notable for their flexible melodic design and strong relation to spoken language. Many songs are built on pentatonic or hexatonic pitch organization, but their expressive effect often depends on ornamentation, sliding tones, repeated melodic cells, and subtle rhythmic freedom. Instead of strictly fixed phrase lengths, performers frequently shape musical lines according to breath, dialect pronunciation, and emotional intent. This creates a close connection between text and melody. In many cases, the upper line may function as an image-building or metaphorical opening, while the following line states the emotional theme more directly. Such a structure supports both lyrical compression and vivid poetic expression (Caiqin, 2022; Mei, 2021).

The lyrical content of Shanxi folk songs also demonstrates their close relationship with everyday life. Common themes include love, separation, homesickness, labor, poverty, migration, family relations, and local customs. In areas historically affected by the phenomenon of “walking westward” or leaving home for work, songs often express farewell, endurance, and longing. In other cases, folk songs celebrate seasonal labor, village festivities, or humorous social interaction. Because they emerged from oral tradition, the lyrics are usually concise, image-rich, and strongly connected to local dialect. This linguistic quality gives Shanxi folk songs a powerful sense of place and makes them important carriers of regional memory and identity (Zhou & Hou, 2022, Caiqin, 2022).

Another important feature of Shanxi folk songs is regional diversity within the province itself. Northern Shanxi traditions are often more open-throated, high-pitched, and expansive, reflecting plateau aesthetics and cross-regional exchange with neighboring areas of Shaanxi and Inner Mongolia. Central Shanxi song traditions often show more flexible melodic turns and connections with village performance culture. Southern Shanxi songs may sound relatively softer or more delicate, shaped by different dialectal and social conditions. Eastern and southeastern parts of the province also preserve distinctive melodic materials connected with mountain settlements and local ritual life. Therefore, “Shanxi folk songs” should not be understood as a single homogeneous style, but as a broad musical system with multiple local branches (Shanxi Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage List, n.d., Caiqin, 2022).

Within this broad system, *shanqu* occupies a particularly significant position because it concentrates many of the core characteristics associated with northwestern folk expression: free rhythm, emotionally direct text, wide melodic motion, and strong vocal penetration. It is also closely tied to oral creativity. Singers may modify words, adjust melodic turns, or insert exclamatory particles according to context. This improvisational tendency means that authenticity in folk performance is not based on strict uniformity but on appropriate style, dialectal flavor, and emotional truthfulness. For this reason, the study of *shanqu* is highly valuable for understanding how vocal

technique, local language, and cultural meaning interact in Shanxi folk traditions (Caiqin, 2022, Wang, Razali and Musib, 2024).

From the perspective of cultural function, Shanxi folk songs have historically served more than entertainment. They worked as means of communication, emotional release, moral commentary, and social participation. In agricultural communities, songs could accompany work and reduce fatigue. In ritual or festive contexts, they helped shape collective atmosphere and reinforce local customs. In courtship settings, antiphonal or responsive singing allowed for indirect but meaningful emotional exchange. Because of these functions, folk songs became embedded in community life and were transmitted not through formal notation but through repeated use, imitation, and memory. Their musical value is therefore inseparable from their social value (UNESCO, 2003, Zhou and Hou, 2024).

In the modern era, the transmission of Shanxi folk songs has entered a period of both opportunity and challenge. On the one hand, official recognition of folk traditions as intangible cultural heritage has brought greater documentation, funding, and public visibility. Important items such as Left-Quan Kaihua Diao and Hequ folk songs appear in provincial intangible cultural heritage listings, while Shanxi's legal and policy framework also emphasizes the protection of traditional music and folk-song resources (Shanxi Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage List, n.d., UNESCO, 2003). On the other hand, modernization, migration, aging bearers, and changing media habits have weakened the natural environments in which these songs were once learned and practiced. As a result, many traditions now depend on a combination of community practice, staged performance, research, and educational transmission (Wang, Razali, and Musib, 2024, Caiqin, 2022).

In summary, Shanxi folk songs should be understood as a historically deep, regionally diverse, and culturally meaningful body of traditional music. Their artistic identity is shaped by environment, dialect, social practice, and oral transmission. They preserve the emotional world of ordinary people while also offering important material for the study of Chinese folk music, regional vocal aesthetics, and intangible cultural

heritage (UNESCO, 2003, Caiqin, 2022). For the present study, this broader understanding of Shanxi folk songs provides the necessary foundation for a more focused discussion of *shanqu* and, subsequently, the analysis of Shi Zhanming's singing techniques.

2.2 General Knowledge of Singing Techniques

Singing techniques are a core part of music performance, involving vocalization, breath control, pitch, rhythm, and expression. According to "Vocal Music Theory" (Chen, 2016), singing techniques can be divided into two systems: Western vocal music techniques (e.g., bel canto, focusing on chest voice, head voice, and mixed voice coordination) and Chinese folk vocal music techniques (e.g., "yuan sheng" [original voice], emphasizing naturalness and regional characteristics).

For Chinese folk songs, singing techniques are closely linked to local culture. Zhao (2017) argued in "Chinese Folk Singing Techniques" that folk singers often develop unique techniques based on their living environment. For example, singers in northern China (like Shanxi) tend to have stronger vocal penetrating power due to the need to sing in open areas, while singers in southern China (like Jiangsu) prefer softer, more gentle timbres.

Breath control is a key part of folk song singing. Wang (2019) noted that folk songs often have long phrases and large interval jumps, requiring singers to master "abdominal breathing" to maintain breath stability. For example, in Shanqu, a single phrase can last 8 - 12 beats, and singers need to control their breath evenly to avoid breaking the melody. Pitch handling is also important—folk songs often use "micro - pitch variations" (slightly raising or lowering a note) to express emotions, which is different from the strict pitch requirements of Western classical music (Li, 2021).

In addition to the distinction between Western and Chinese vocal systems, recent vocal studies have increasingly emphasized the integration of traditional singing practices with scientific vocal training. This integration is particularly relevant for Shanqu singing, which requires both natural vocal expression and technical control.

From a physiological perspective, effective singing techniques involve the coordination of three key systems: respiration (breath support), phonation (vocal fold vibration), and resonance (sound amplification and shaping). In Shanqu singing, these elements must be adapted to achieve a bright, penetrating tone without excessive tension. This requires a balance between natural voice production and controlled vocal technique.

Moreover, the concept of “efficient vocalization” has gained attention in modern vocal pedagogy. Efficient vocalization refers to producing maximum acoustic output with minimal physical effort, which is essential for sustaining high-pitched and long phrases commonly found in Shanqu. Shi Zhanming’s singing techniques, as analyzed in this study, exemplify this principle by combining strong projection with relaxed vocal production.

From a broader pedagogical perspective, singing techniques may be understood as a coordinated system of physiological control and artistic expression rather than as isolated mechanical skills. In vocal performance, technical efficiency depends on the interaction of breathing, phonation, resonance, articulation, register adjustment, and expressive intention. For this reason, modern vocal pedagogy often treats technique as a process of functional integration in which the singer’s body, language, and musical interpretation operate together. In the context of Chinese folk singing, this integrated view is especially important because vocal technique is not separated from regional style, linguistic character, or cultural meaning (Wang and Zhao, 2024, Zhang and Ter, 2026).

A fundamental component of singing technique is breath support. Although all styles of singing require airflow control, the functional use of breath differs across genres. In folk traditions, breath is often shaped by textual pacing, emotional inflection, and the practical need to project sound naturally rather than produce a highly manufactured timbre. Effective breathing involves coordinated expansion of the lower torso, steady release of air, and the ability to adjust pressure according to phrase length, pitch height, and dynamic demand. Research on Chinese vocal training and folk performance

consistently identifies breath management as the basis for vocal stability, phrase continuity, and tonal clarity (Chen, Kanwicha, Teerapuksiri, 2026, Wang, Karin and Sensai, 2025).

Closely related to breathing is phonation, or the manner in which vocal sound is initiated and sustained. In efficient singing, phonation should neither be overly pressed nor excessively breathy. Instead, the singer seeks a balanced onset in which the vocal folds vibrate with sufficient closure to create a clear tone while remaining flexible enough for expressive variation. In Chinese folk singing, this balance is particularly significant because the aesthetic ideal often values immediacy, brightness, and directness of tone. The singer must therefore preserve a natural sound while still maintaining enough technical control to support long phrases, pitch changes, and emotional intensity. Studies of vocal efficiency suggest that this balance contributes not only to tonal quality but also to endurance and vocal health (Wang and Zhao, 2024, Bin, 2025).

Resonance is another essential aspect of singing technique because it affects projection, timbre, and intelligibility. In practical terms, resonance involves the shaping and amplification of sound through the vocal tract, oral cavity, pharyngeal space, and, in perceptual terms, the facial resonating area often described by singers as the “mask.” Acoustic studies of modern Chinese folk singing show that effective resonance contributes to vocal carrying power and enhances brightness without requiring excessive muscular force. For folk styles associated with open landscapes and outdoor performance, resonance is not merely an aesthetic refinement but a practical necessity. A resonant voice can travel farther, remain intelligible, and sustain musical intensity with less vocal strain (Wang & Zhao, 2024; Wang, Karin, & Sensai, 2025).

Register coordination also plays a major role in vocal technique. Singing across different pitch areas requires the singer to negotiate the relationship among chest voice, middle voice, head voice, and mixed registration. In many forms of Chinese folk song, particularly northern styles, singers frequently encounter wide melodic leaps, high tessitura, and sudden shifts in expressive intensity. A singer who cannot coordinate registers smoothly may produce audible breaks, unstable pitch, or excessive throat

tension. Conversely, effective register management enables a continuous tonal line and supports the stylistic contrast between power and flexibility that many folk repertoires demand. Contemporary research on Chinese vocal pedagogy emphasizes that register blending is particularly valuable when traditional singing styles are performed in modern educational or staged contexts (Chen, Kanwicha, Teerapuksiri, 2026, Peilu and Yap, 2025).

In addition to physiological control, diction and articulation are central to singing techniques, especially in language-based vocal traditions. Because Chinese is a tonal language, the relationship between word tone, consonant articulation, vowel shape, and melodic line is particularly close. Precise articulation is necessary not only for textual clarity but also for preserving the expressive connection between speech and song. In folk singing, articulation often carries local dialect features that shape rhythm, melodic contour, and regional identity. Therefore, singers must master both the physical production of consonants and vowels and the stylistic nuances of pronunciation required by a specific repertoire. Scholarship on Chinese vocal performance repeatedly notes that the integration of articulation and resonance is essential to achieving both intelligibility and artistic vitality (Ding, Chuluuntsetseg, 2025, Zhang, Kanwicha and Teerapuksiri, 2026).

Ornamentation is likewise an important technical and stylistic component. In many folk traditions, singers do not simply reproduce a melodic skeleton; they animate it through slides, turns, grace notes, rhythmic elasticity, and timbral nuance. These ornaments are often learned through imitation and performance experience rather than through formal notation. Their execution requires control of breath flow, pitch precision, and flexible vocal adjustment. In Chinese vocal studies, such embellishment is often discussed through the concept of *runqiang*, which refers to the enrichment of melody and tone with stylistically meaningful nuance. Rather than being decorative additions, these features function as core carriers of regional expression and musical identity (Peilu and Yap, 2025, Zhang and Ter, 2026).

Singing techniques must also be understood in relation to expressive delivery. Technical control becomes artistically meaningful only when it supports phrasing, dynamic contrast, emotional coloring, and rhetorical emphasis. In folk song performance, expression often depends on a singer's ability to align technical means with textual imagery and cultural mood. A change in breath pressure may intensify longing; a shift in resonance may brighten the tone; a moment of rubato may highlight emotional hesitation or emphasis. Thus, expression is not separate from technique but emerges through it. Recent vocal research increasingly stresses that technical training should cultivate interpretive awareness rather than prioritize mechanical accuracy alone (Bin, 2025, Zhang, Chonprirot, 2024).

Another aspect that deserves attention is the role of the body in vocal production. Posture, muscular release, and physical coordination influence breathing efficiency, laryngeal stability, and resonance freedom. In folk performance, bodily use also interacts with movement, gesture, and performance context. The singer may stand differently in a concert hall than in a rural outdoor environment, and these differences affect sound production. Efficient technique therefore depends not only on internal physiology but also on the singer's physical relationship to space and audience. This is particularly relevant for traditions such as Shanqu, where projection, immediacy, and communicative force are central to style (Wang, Karin, and Sensai, 2025, Wang, Razali, and Musib, 2024).

In summary, general knowledge of singing techniques should include both physiological mechanisms and stylistic application. Breath, phonation, resonance, register coordination, diction, ornamentation, and expressive shaping together form the technical basis of vocal performance. In Chinese folk singing, these techniques cannot be separated from language, region, and cultural context. This broader understanding is especially important for the present study because the analysis of Shi Zhanming's singing requires not only identifying vocal skills but also explaining how those skills operate within the aesthetic logic of Shanqu. Accordingly, a discussion of general singing techniques provides the conceptual bridge between broad vocal theory and the

specific performance analysis developed in later chapters (UNESCO, 2003; Zhang & Ter, 2026).

2.3 General Knowledge of Music's Characteristics

Music’s characteristics refer to the unique attributes of a music genre, including melody, rhythm, harmony, lyrics, and performance style. For folk songs, these characteristics are deeply rooted in regional culture. According to "Folk Musicology" (Zhou, 2014), the characteristics of folk music can be analyzed from three aspects:

1. Melodic Characteristics: Folk songs often have simple, memorable melodies. Shanqu, for example, uses a five - tone scale (do, re, mi, sol, la) and frequent upward leaps (e.g., a jump of a perfect fourth or fifth) to create a high - pitched, bold effect (Zhang, 2016).

2. Lyric Characteristics: Folk song lyrics are usually oral, colloquial, and narrative. Shanqu lyrics often focus on daily life, such as herding ("A Basket of Oil on the High Mountain"), love ("Pink Peach Blossoms and White Apricot Blossoms"), and labor ("Going Westward"), with a strong sense of realism (Liu, 2018).

3. Performance Characteristics: Folk song performances are often "impromptu" singers may adjust the melody or lyrics according to the scene. For example, Shi Zhanming sometimes adds local proverbs or exclamations (e.g., "Ai ya!") to his performances to enhance interactivity with the audience (Wang, 2022).

In addition, folk music has a strong "collective" nature-it is created and inherited by the general public, rather than individual composers. This means that Shanqu’s characteristics are constantly evolving as they are passed down, reflecting the changes in local society (Zhou, 2014).

Beyond structural characteristics, it is important to consider the interaction between musical elements and performance practice. In Shanqu, melody, rhythm, and language are closely interconnected. The tonal nature of the Chinese language directly

influences melodic contour, while dialect pronunciation affects rhythmic articulation and phrasing.

In particular, the use of pentatonic scales in Shanqu does not function merely as a tonal system but also as a cultural marker that distinguishes it from Western tonal music. The flexibility of pitch, including microtonal variation and sliding tones, allows singers to express subtle emotional nuances that cannot be captured through fixed pitch systems alone.

Additionally, the improvisational nature of Shanqu performance reflects its oral tradition. Unlike composed music with fixed notation, Shanqu allows performers to modify melodic lines, rhythm, and ornamentation based on context and personal interpretation. This characteristic highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of folk music, where variation is not considered deviation but an essential aspect of authenticity.

From a musicological perspective, musical characteristics refer to the structural and expressive features that distinguish one repertoire from another. These characteristics usually include pitch organization, melodic contour, rhythmic pattern, phrasing, timbre, text setting, and performance practice. In folk music, such features are not merely abstract musical devices; they are shaped by language, environment, social usage, and oral transmission. For this reason, the study of musical characteristics is especially important in Chinese folk traditions, where sound structure and cultural context are closely interconnected (Nan & Guan, 2024; UNESCO, 2003).

One of the most widely recognized musical features of Chinese folk music is the importance of pentatonic organization. Although Chinese folk repertoires are more diverse than a simple five-note model suggests, pentatonic pitch relations remain a central point of reference in many regional traditions. Studies of traditional Chinese folk songs show that anhemitonic pentatonic structures are especially prominent and often produce a distinctive melodic profile that differs from common Western tonal habits. This pitch organization contributes to a sense of openness, balance, and memorability in melodic design, while also allowing for local modal variation through auxiliary and changing tones (Liu, et al., 2022, Ho, 1984).

Melody is usually the most prominent musical dimension in folk song. Compared with highly harmonic musical systems, folk-song traditions often rely more heavily on the expressive power of melodic line. In many Chinese folk genres, melodies are characterized by singable contours, clear motivic identity, repetition with variation, and close relation to speech patterns. Upward movement, wave-like contour, and flexible intervallic shaping may all be used to project emotion and to support the natural delivery of text. In Shanxi folk songs specifically, scholars have observed that melodic lines frequently show broad arcs, strong directional motion, and a tendency toward high-register emphasis, all of which contribute to the bold and expansive sound associated with northern singing styles (Guo, 2022, Mei, 2021).

Rhythm and phrasing are equally important in defining musical style. In many folk-song traditions, rhythm is not governed by strict metric regularity alone but is shaped by breath, text accent, and expressive timing. This results in a flexible rhythmic language that can sound speech-like while still preserving recognizable structural patterns. Chinese folk songs often show a close interaction between lyric rhythm and musical phrase, allowing the singer to adjust duration, pause, and accent according to semantic and emotional emphasis. In repertoires such as Shanqu, free or semi-free rhythm is especially significant because it enables the performer to extend emotional moments, intensify projection, and preserve the natural flow of local speech (Cross, 2021, Guo, 2022).

Another essential musical characteristic is the close relationship between language and melody. In tonal languages, musical setting cannot be fully separated from speech contour. Pronunciation, lexical tone, dialectal rhythm, and vowel color all influence melodic movement and phrase design. Research on Chinese song traditions has shown that tone–melody correspondence is often a major factor in shaping melodic structure, especially in regional styles where dialect is strongly preserved. This means that musical characteristics must be understood not only in terms of abstract notes but also in relation to linguistic behavior. In Shanxi folk traditions, dialectal pronunciation contributes directly to phrasing, accentuation, and expressive timbre, helping create a regional

sound identity that listeners can immediately recognize (Cross, 2021, Zhou and Hou, 2022).

Timbre also functions as a musical characteristic, not merely a vocal effect. In folk singing, timbre often carries regional meaning and social memory. A bright, penetrating tone may suggest open landscapes and long-distance projection, whereas a softer or more delicate timbre may reflect different environmental and aesthetic conditions. Because timbre is shaped by vocal placement, resonance habits, and local ideals of sound beauty, it becomes part of the musical identity of a genre. Shanxi folk songs are often associated with direct, resonant, and high-energy timbral qualities, especially in mountain-song forms where voice must carry expressive force over wide terrain (Mei, 2021, Guo, 2022).

Ornamentation and pitch inflection further enrich musical expression. Folk-song performance rarely depends on a bare melodic skeleton alone. Instead, singers shape melodies through slides, grace-like embellishments, repeated notes, local turns, and micro-variations in intonation. These features may not always be fully captured in notation, yet they are essential to style. In many Chinese vocal traditions, ornamentation is not decorative in a superficial sense; rather, it forms part of the musical grammar through which emotional intensity and regional identity are communicated. Such flexibility of pitch and melodic detail is one reason oral traditions can preserve continuity while still permitting individual variation in performance (Kouwenhoven and Schimmel penninck, 2008, Peilu and Yap, 2025).

Improvisation is another important musical characteristic in orally transmitted traditions. Because folk songs are learned and transmitted through practice rather than fixed notation alone, performers often adapt melodic detail, rhythm, and wording according to context. This does not mean that the tradition lacks structure; rather, it means that structure coexists with controlled flexibility. Improvisation allows songs to remain socially relevant and emotionally immediate, while still retaining recognizable stylistic boundaries. Research on oral traditions in China consistently shows that

reproduction, variation, and spontaneous adjustment are part of how musical identity is maintained across generations (UNESCO, 2006; Zhang, 2021).

The geographical and social environment also has a decisive influence on musical characteristics. Folk songs do not emerge in isolation from lived experience. Regional topography, patterns of labor, seasonal activities, community rituals, and social interaction all shape the design and function of musical sound. Recent cultural and geographical studies of Chinese folk songs emphasize that environment can affect not only lyrical imagery but also vocal power, melodic range, and performance context. In mountain regions, for example, singers may favor more projected tone, larger melodic intervals, and expansive phrase shapes. This helps explain why Shanxi and neighboring northwestern traditions are often marked by strong projection and open melodic gesture (Wang, et al., 2025, Gao and Shi, 2023).

At the same time, musical characteristics are historically dynamic rather than fixed. As traditions move from village life to classroom, stage, archive, and digital media, their musical forms may be adjusted. Rhythm may become more regular, ornamentation may be simplified, dialect may be moderated, and performance duration may be shortened. Yet these changes do not necessarily erase tradition; they may instead represent processes of adaptation. In the case of Shanxi folk songs, recent scholarship on dissemination and heritage practice suggests that the contemporary survival of Shanqu and related genres depends on a balance between stylistic preservation and new channels of presentation (Wang, Razali, and Musib, 2024, Tang, 2021).

In summary, general knowledge of musical characteristics should include both structural features and cultural functions. Melody, pentatonic organization, rhythm, phrasing, dialect, timbre, ornamentation, improvisation, and performance context together shape the identity of a musical tradition. In Chinese folk song, these features operate as an integrated system rather than separate elements. For the present study, this understanding is especially important because the musical characteristics of Shanqu provide the stylistic background necessary for analyzing how Shi Zhanming’s singing techniques function within a specific regional tradition. Therefore, a discussion of

musical characteristics forms an essential bridge between broad folk-music theory and focused performance analysis (Nan and Guan, 2024, Wang, Razali and Musib, 2024).

2.4 Theoretical Framework for This Study

This study is guided by a theoretical framework that combines cultural heritage studies, performance theory, ethnomusicology, and voice pedagogy. These perspectives are selected because the research addresses two related dimensions: first, the current status of *Shanqu* as a regional folk-song tradition in contemporary society; and second, the singing techniques used by Shi Zhanming in performance. Rather than treating Shanqu only as repertoire or only as vocal practice, this framework makes it possible to analyze the tradition as a living cultural form, a performed social act, a regional music culture, and a technical vocal practice (UNESCO, 2003, Schechner, 2003, Rice, 2014).

The first theoretical perspective is the concept of intangible cultural heritage. According to UNESCO (2003), intangible cultural heritage includes practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This perspective is appropriate for the present study because Shanqu is transmitted through performance, oral practice, local language, and community memory rather than through fixed notation alone. Using this framework, the study examines how Shanqu is preserved, transformed, and recontextualized under conditions of modernization, institutional support, and media circulation. It also helps explain why continuity depends not only on documentation but also on living practice, active performers, and community recognition.

The second perspective is performance theory. Richard Schechner (2003) argues that performance should be understood not only as staged presentation but also as socially meaningful action shaped by context, behavior, and cultural codes. This theory is useful for analyzing Shi Zhanming's singing because his performances are not merely technical demonstrations; they are also acts of cultural representation that communicate regional identity, vocal style, and aesthetic values. Through this lens,

vocal delivery, costume, gesture, stage manner, and audience relationship can be understood as parts of a single performance event. Thus, performance theory helps connect singing technique with broader questions of representation, embodiment, and cultural meaning.

The third perspective is ethnomusicology. From an ethnomusicological viewpoint, music is studied as a cultural practice embedded in social life rather than as an abstract sound structure alone. Timothy Rice (2014) emphasizes the close relationship between music and culture, while ethnomusicological theory more broadly highlights the importance of linking sound, behavior, transmission, and meaning. This perspective is particularly relevant to Shanqu because its melodic shape, dialect use, improvisational flexibility, and vocal style are all closely tied to environment, oral tradition, and regional identity. By applying an ethnomusicological approach, the study can interpret Shi Zhanming's singing not only in terms of vocal skill but also in terms of how musical technique reflects the social and cultural logic of Shanxi folk-song tradition.

The fourth perspective is voice pedagogy and performance analysis. Because the second objective of this research is to analyze singing techniques, a technical framework is needed to examine breath support, phonation, resonance, register coordination, diction, and expressive control. Research in voice science and pedagogy explains that singing depends on the interaction of respiratory, phonatory, and resonatory systems, and that efficient vocal production supports both endurance and expressive freedom. This framework is especially useful for identifying how Shi Zhanming sustains high-register passages, projects tone, manages resonance, and preserves a folk vocal quality without excessive strain. Therefore, voice pedagogy provides the analytical tools for discussing how technique functions at the physiological and artistic levels in actual performance (Herbst, 2017, NATS, n.d.).

Taken together, these four perspectives form the theoretical framework of this study. The intangible cultural heritage perspective supports the discussion of preservation and continuity; performance theory explains how meaning is produced in live and staged performance; ethnomusicology connects vocal style with regional culture and

oral tradition; and voice pedagogy enables detailed analysis of singing technique. This integrated framework is more consistent with the actual design of the research than a broad list of unrelated theories, because it directly supports both research objectives and provides a clear bridge from literature review to methodology and analysis.

2.5 Related Literature and Research

Related literature and previous research provide an essential academic basis for the present study because they clarify how Shanxi folk songs have been examined from historical, cultural, linguistic, pedagogical, and performance perspectives. Existing studies show that Shanxi folk songs are not only regional musical products but also complex cultural forms shaped by geography, dialect, oral transmission, and social practice. At the same time, the review of prior scholarship reveals that research has developed unevenly. While there is already considerable attention to folk-song history, artistic characteristics, and heritage protection, fewer studies investigate the detailed singing techniques that sustain the expressive identity of *Shanqu* in actual performance. Therefore, this section reviews related literature with particular emphasis on research trends, major findings, methodological contributions, and unresolved academic issues relevant to the present thesis.

A major body of scholarship concentrates on the historical development and artistic features of Shanxi folk songs as a broad musical system. The doctoral research *The Model for Conservation and Development Folksong in Shanxi Province, China* identifies melodic wave-like motion, pentatonic orientation, simple rhythmic combinations, and close relationships among melody, language, and local customs as core characteristics of selected Shanxi folk songs (Guo, 2022). Similarly, *Analysis on the Artistic Characteristics of Shanxi Folk Songs and Vocal Singing Emotion* explains that geography, history, and local life in Shanxi have produced distinctive singing styles and emotional expression patterns, especially in representative repertoires such as Zuoquan flowering tunes (Mei, 2021). In addition, the article *A Study on the Development Path of Shanxi Folk*

Songs from the Perspective of the Integration of Culture and Tourism emphasizes that Shanxi folk songs reflect realistic aspects of local life, preserve dialect-based identity, and remain central to regional cultural representation in contemporary dissemination (Zhou & Hou, 2024). Together, these studies establish that Shanxi folk songs should be understood as historically deep, regionally differentiated, and culturally embedded vocal traditions rather than as isolated musical texts.

Another important line of research examines Shanxi folk music through dialectology and acoustic analysis. The dissertation *Study on Shanxi Folk Music from the Perspective of Dialectology* is especially important because it analyzes the phonetic, lexical, and grammatical features embedded in Shanxi folk music and argues that accurate understanding of dialect is fundamental to both performance and inheritance (Zhao, 2020). This work also proposes that experimental acoustic methods can provide more objective criteria for understanding vocal style and learning to sing Shanxi folk music. Such findings are directly relevant to the present study because *Shanqu* singing depends heavily on dialectal pronunciation, tone–melody coordination, and regionally specific articulation. The literature therefore suggests that vocal analysis in folk-song research cannot be separated from linguistic identity. Instead, diction, accent, and phonetic shaping operate as musical resources that influence resonance, phrasing, emotional delivery, and stylistic authenticity.

A further cluster of studies focuses on inheritance, conservation, and contemporary dissemination. In Guo's (2022) doctoral study, the protection of Shanxi folk songs is discussed through models such as government support, annual folk-song contests, large-scale performances, and university activities, indicating that contemporary preservation increasingly depends on institutional and public-cultural frameworks. Likewise, the article by Zhou and Hou (2024) links the future of Shanxi folk songs to communication strategies, cultural-tourism integration, and the combined use of traditional and modern dissemination channels. Although these studies are not limited to *Shanqu*, they are valuable because they explain why many folk-song traditions now survive through hybrid modes that combine community practice, education, media

circulation, and policy support. For the present research, this literature helps explain the broader context in which Shi Zhanming's performances function-not simply as personal artistry, but also as part of contemporary transmission and cultural representation.

Because direct technical studies of *Shanqu* singing remain limited, comparative scholarship on neighboring Loess Plateau traditions-especially northern Shaanxi folk songs—offers useful methodological support. In *A Study on 高腔 (Gao Qiang) Vocal Technique by Selected Northern Shaanxi Folk Songs,* Li and Yap (2024) identify the importance of large interval spans, high-register control, and regionally specific vocal production in northern Shaanxi folk singing. In *Correct Diction and Emotion Expression on Selected Northern Shaanxi Folk Songs*, Li and Yap (2024) further show that correct dialect diction and emotional expression are inseparable in the performance of Loess Plateau repertories. Although these studies are regionally different from Shanxi *Shanqu*, they provide comparative evidence that vocal brightness, projection, diction, and inheritance mechanisms are central research variables in northwestern Chinese folk-song traditions.

From a methodological perspective, the reviewed literature demonstrates several recurring approaches. First, many studies rely on documentary research to establish historical background and genre classification. Second, interview-based and fieldwork-oriented studies are commonly used to investigate inheritance conditions, performer experience, and community practice. Third, some recent studies adopt acoustic or practice-led methods in order to analyze technical vocal details more systematically. This trend is particularly important for the present thesis because it suggests that effective folk-song research should not stop at descriptive cultural interpretation. Instead, it should connect documentary evidence, performer-centered observation, and technical vocal analysis. In other words, the literature increasingly supports an interdisciplinary approach in which ethnomusicology, vocal pedagogy, dialect study, and cultural heritage theory work together. Such an integrated method is especially suitable for analyzing Shi Zhanming, whose artistry involves both traditional style retention and technically refined stage performance.

Despite the richness of existing literature, several significant research gaps remain. First, most previous studies focus on history, artistic characteristics, dissemination, and policy support, while only limited attention has been given to a systematic explanation of how specific singing techniques operate in performance. In many cases, terms such as “bright tone,” “high pitch,” “local flavor,” or “emotional expression” are used descriptively, but they are not broken down into analyzable technical components such as breath coordination, resonance placement, register management, diction control, and ornamentation practice.

Second, performer-centered research remains insufficient. Although outstanding singers are often mentioned in descriptive articles or cultural reports, there is still a lack of sustained academic analysis of Shi Zhanming as a representative contemporary performer of *Shanqu*. Existing publications tend to praise his artistry, biography, or cultural influence, yet they rarely explain in a structured manner how his vocal production, breath support, pitch handling, dialect articulation, and true–false voice transition contribute to the preservation of *Shanqu* style. This absence is particularly important because representative performers are often the most visible carriers of living heritage in modern performance contexts.

Third, the relationship between vocal technique and cultural transmission remains underexplored. Much of the previous scholarship treats singing technique and heritage preservation as separate topics: one body of work discusses conservation policy and dissemination, while another discusses vocal style in general terms. However, in actual folk-song practice, technique is one of the mechanisms through which tradition survives. The way a singer projects tone, pronounces dialect, shapes melodic inflection, and balances naturalness with training directly affects whether a repertoire continues to sound regionally authentic. Therefore, a more integrated analysis is needed to show how technical practice itself functions as a form of cultural inheritance.

Therefore, the present study responds directly to the limitations identified in previous scholarship. By focusing on the current status of *Shanqu* and on Shi Zhanming as a representative performer, this research combines literature review, field investigation,

cultural interpretation, and performance-based vocal analysis. It does not treat *Shanqu* merely as a historical artifact or only as a heritage symbol; rather, it examines the technical means through which the genre is artistically realized and culturally sustained in contemporary society. In this sense, the study extends earlier literature by bringing together three dimensions that have too often been separated in prior research: regional folk-song identity, concrete singing technique, and the ongoing transmission of intangible cultural heritage.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology used in this study, including its scope and research process, to ensure academic rigor and methodological soundness.

This study, entitled Study of the Singing Technique of ‘Shanqu Song of Shanxi Folksong" by Shi Zhanming, has two main objectives: (1) to investigate the current status of Shanqu folksong and (2) to analyze the singing techniques of Shi Zhanming. To achieve these objectives, this research employs a qualitative research approach, including literature review, field investigation, performance observation, and case study analysis.

3.1 Research Scope

3.1.1 Scope of Content

This study is limited to the investigation of two main aspects in order to remain consistent with the research objectives and qualitative design. First, it examines the current status of *Shanqu* in Shanxi Province, with emphasis on its transmission, performance contexts, and continuity in contemporary society. Second, it analyzes the singing techniques of Shi Zhanming as a representative performer of *Shanqu*, focusing on vocal production, breath control, pitch and register coordination, diction, expressive delivery, emotional expression, ornamentation, and falsetto–modal voice transition.

The scope of content is based on qualitative data obtained from document review, field observation, interview data, and selected performance materials. Particular attention is given to the representative song *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You* as the primary case for performance analysis, because it provides suitable material for examining Shi Zhanming’s technical and stylistic approach within the framework of Shanxi folk-song tradition.

This scope does not attempt to cover every regional variant of Shanxi folk songs or every performer associated with *Shanqu*. Instead, it is intentionally limited to a focused case-based study so that the analysis can be academically manageable, methodologically coherent, and sufficiently detailed to support reliable interpretation.

3.1.2 Scope of the Research Site

The research site is limited to Shanxi Province, People's Republic of China, because it is the principal cultural area of *Shanqu* and the home region of the performer examined in this study. Field-based information and contextual evidence were gathered from locations relevant to *Shanqu* practice, cultural activities, and the researcher's access to local materials and informants in Shanxi.

The study includes information derived from interviews and observations involving knowledgeable persons related to *Shanqu*, such as performers, cultural practitioners, and relevant local informants, together with performance materials and documentary sources connected to Shi Zhanming and Shanxi folk-song culture.

Shanxi Province was selected because it provides the most appropriate cultural and geographical context for understanding the present condition of *Shanqu* and for interpreting Shi Zhanming's singing style in relation to local tradition, dialect, and performance practice.



Figure 3.1 Location of Shanxi Province in the People's Republic of China Source: Adapted from NordNordWest. (2024, May 2). *China Shanxi rel location map.svg* [Map]. *Wikimedia Commons*.

3.1.3 Scope of Time

The period of this study extends from August 2024 to March 2026, covering the stages of topic development, literature review, field-data collection, performance analysis, interpretation, and thesis writing.

3.1.4 Selected key informant

The selected key informant in this study was Shi Zhanming, who was chosen through purposive selection in accordance with the qualitative research design and the research objectives. He was selected as the primary key informant because he is a representative performer of *Shanqu* and the central figure in the analysis of singing techniques in this study. His direct experience in performing Shanxi folk songs, together with his recognized role in the preservation and contemporary presentation of *Shanqu*, makes his knowledge highly relevant to both the investigation of the current status of *Shanqu* and the analysis of vocal techniques. In addition, information from Shi Zhanming was used together with documentary sources, field observation, and selected performance materials in order to strengthen the credibility and contextual depth of the study.



Figure 3.2 Selected Key Informant, Shi Zhanming Source: Song Meiling

3.2 Research Process

The research process of this study is designed in accordance with qualitative research methodology and is carried out through six interrelated stages. These stages are intended to ensure coherence between the research objectives, data sources, analytical procedures, and final presentation of the findings.

3.2.1 Topic Formulation and Conceptual Framing Stage: In the first stage, the researcher identified the research problem, formulated the title, clarified the objectives, and established the conceptual direction of the study. This stage also included the selection of key concepts related to *Shanqu*, singing technique, cultural transmission, and qualitative inquiry in order to provide a clear basis for the overall research design.

3.2.2 Literature Review Stage: In the second stage, the researcher reviewed related documents, previous studies, theoretical works, and relevant materials concerning Shanxi folk songs, *Shanqu*, vocal technique, performance analysis, dialect, and intangible cultural heritage. This stage provided the academic foundation for Chapter II and helped define the theoretical framework and research gap addressed by the study.

3.2.3 Field Preparation and Data Collection Stage: In the third stage, the researcher prepared for fieldwork and collected qualitative data from multiple sources. These included document review, field observation, interview data, and selected performance materials related to *Shanqu* and Shi Zhanming. Special attention was given to the song *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You* as the principal case for performance-based analysis.

3.2.4 Data Organization Stage: In the fourth stage, the collected materials were organized systematically according to their type and relevance to the research objectives. Interview records, observation notes, documentary sources, and performance materials were arranged for ease of interpretation. This stage enabled the researcher to identify key themes related to the current status of *Shanqu* and the singing techniques demonstrated by Shi Zhanming.

3.2.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation Stage: In the fifth stage, the researcher analyzed the collected data through qualitative interpretation, using cultural, musicological, and performance-based perspectives. The analysis focused on two main dimensions: the current status of *Shanqu* in contemporary society and the singing techniques of Shi Zhanming, including vocal production, breath control, pitch and register coordination, diction, expressive delivery, emotional expression, ornamentation, and falsetto-modal voice transition.

3.2.6 Thesis Writing and Revision Stage: In the final stage, the researcher synthesized the findings, organized them into the structure of the thesis, and revised the content to ensure consistency between the objectives, methodology, analysis, and conclusion. This stage resulted in the completion of the research report in accordance with academic writing standards.

3.3 Research Tools

The research tools used in this study are designed in accordance with qualitative research methodology and are intended to support the collection and interpretation of data related to the current status of *Shanqu* and the singing techniques of Shi Zhanming.

The main research tools consist of: (1) a document review guide for collecting and examining books, academic articles, theses, archival sources, and related materials concerning Shanxi folk songs, *Shanqu*, vocal technique, and cultural heritage: (2) a semi-structured interview guide for gathering information from knowledgeable persons related to *Shanqu*, including performers, cultural practitioners, and relevant informants; (3) an observation guide for recording field-based information on performance context, vocal practice, and related cultural activities; and (4) a performance-analysis framework used to examine the selected case material, especially Shi Zhanming's performance of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You*, in terms of vocal production, breath control, pitch and register coordination, diction, expressive delivery, emotional expression, ornamentation, and falsetto–modal voice transition.

To strengthen the credibility of the research instruments, the document review guide, semi-structured interview guide, observation guide, and performance-analysis framework were reviewed by five experts for content appropriateness and consistency with the research objectives. The expert reviewers were:

3.3.1 Assistant Professor Dr. Suteerapong Pinitpol

3.3.2 Assistant Professor Dr. Jinda Kaensombat

3.3.3 Dr. Amporn Saengchaiya

3.3.4 Dr. Piyanan Nawkamdee and

3.3.5 Dr. Charoenchai Sangarun.

3.4 Data Collecting

Data collection in this study follows a qualitative research approach and is designed to obtain rich, context-based information related to the current status of *Shanqu* and the singing techniques of Shi Zhanming. The researcher collected data from multiple qualitative sources in order to ensure consistency with the research objectives and to support a comprehensive interpretation of the findings.

3.4.1 Document Review: The researcher collected and reviewed books, theses, academic articles, cultural heritage documents, and related documentary sources concerning Shanxi folk songs, *Shanqu*, dialect, vocal technique, and cultural transmission. This procedure provided historical, theoretical, and contextual information needed to interpret both the present condition of *Shanqu* and the artistic background of Shi Zhanming.

3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interview: The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with knowledgeable persons related to *Shanqu*, including performers, cultural practitioners, and relevant informants. The interviews focused on the present situation of *Shanqu*, patterns of transmission, performance contexts, and perspectives on Shi Zhanming's singing style and significance. This method allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth information that could not be fully captured through documents alone.

3.4.3 Field Observation and Performance Material Collection: The researcher collected field-based information through observation of relevant cultural activities, performance contexts, and available practice environments associated with *Shanqu*. In addition, selected audio-visual performance materials related to Shi Zhanming were collected for qualitative analysis. Particular attention was given to the representative song *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You*, which was used as the principal case for examining vocal production, breath control, pitch and register coordination, diction, expressive delivery, emotional expression, ornamentation, and falsetto–modal voice transition.

3.4.4 Data Triangulation in Collection: During the data collection process, the researcher compared information obtained from documents, interviews, observations, and performance materials in order to improve the completeness and credibility of the data. This triangulated collection process helped ensure that the interpretation of the current status of *Shanqu* and the analysis of Shi Zhanming's singing techniques were grounded in multiple sources of evidence.

3.5 Data Management

Data management in this study was conducted systematically in accordance with qualitative research methodology in order to maintain the organization, traceability, and credibility of the collected materials.

3.5.1 Organization of Data: Documents, interview records, observation notes, and selected performance materials were organized according to data type and relevance to the research objectives. Each set of materials was arranged in a manner that allowed the researcher to review information related to the current status of *Shanqu* and the singing techniques of Shi Zhanming in a clear and consistent way.

3.5.2 Categorization of Data: The collected materials were categorized by major themes relevant to the study, such as transmission, performance context, vocal production, breath control, pitch and register coordination, diction, expressive delivery, emotional expression, ornamentation, and falsetto–modal voice transition. This thematic

arrangement helped the researcher compare information across different data sources and supported the qualitative interpretation presented in later chapters.

3.5.3 Storage and Traceability of Data: All collected materials were stored in an organized manner to support later retrieval and verification. Documentary sources, interview information, observation records, and performance materials were retained with sufficient identifying details, such as source type, date of collection, and contextual notes, in order to strengthen data traceability and support reliable interpretation throughout the study.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted through qualitative interpretation in order to remain consistent with the research objectives, the qualitative research design, and the nature of the collected data. The analysis focused on identifying meaningful patterns, relationships, and themes related to the current status of *Shanqu* and the singing techniques of Shi Zhanming.

3.6.1 Analysis of Data on the Current Status of *Shanqu*: Data related to the current status of *Shanqu* were analyzed through qualitative thematic analysis. Information from documentary sources, interviews, field observation, and contextual evidence was examined in order to identify major themes such as transmission, performance contexts, continuity, contemporary adaptation, and challenges affecting *Shanqu* in present-day society. This analysis provided the basis for the discussion presented in Chapter IV.

3.6.2 Analysis of Shi Zhanming's Singing Techniques: Data concerning Shi Zhanming's singing techniques were analyzed through performance-based and musicological interpretation. The selected performance materials, especially *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You*, were examined in relation to vocal production, breath control, pitch and register coordination, diction, expressive delivery, emotional expression, ornamentation, and falsetto–modal voice transition. The analysis also considered how these technical

features reflect the stylistic identity of *Shanqu* and support the interpretation presented in Chapter V.

3.6.3 Triangulation and Interpretive Synthesis: After the thematic and performance-based analyses were conducted, the researcher compared findings from documents, interviews, observations, and performance materials in order to strengthen the credibility and coherence of interpretation. This triangulated analysis made it possible to relate the current status of *Shanqu* to the vocal practices demonstrated by Shi Zhanming and to explain how singing technique functions within a broader cultural and heritage context.

3.7 Data Presentation

The presentation of data in this study is organized in accordance with the research objectives and the qualitative analytical process. After the introductory, literature review, and methodology chapters, the research findings are presented in two main analytical chapters. Chapter IV presents the findings related to the current status of *Shanqu* in contemporary society, while Chapter V presents the findings related to the singing techniques of Shi Zhanming. The final chapter synthesizes these findings through conclusion, discussion, and suggestions in order to ensure coherence between the research objectives, analysis, and overall interpretation of the study.

Chapter I presents the introduction, including the research background, objectives, questions, benefits, definitions of terms, and conceptual framework.

Chapter II presents the review of related literature, theoretical perspectives, and previous research relevant to Shanxi folk songs, *Shanqu*, and singing techniques.

Chapter III presents the research methodology, including research scope, research process, research tools, data collecting, data management, data analysis, and data presentation.

Chapter IV presents the findings on the current status of *Shanqu* in relation to its transmission, performance contexts, and continuity in contemporary society.

Chapter V presents the analysis of Shi Zhanming’s singing techniques, with emphasis on vocal production, breath control, pitch and register coordination, diction, expressive delivery, emotional expression, ornamentation, and falsetto–modal voice transition.

Chapter VI presents the conclusion, discussion, and suggestions derived from the overall findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4
CURRENT STATUS OF SHANQU

This chapter presents a concise analysis of the current status of Shanqu in contemporary society. Based on document review, field observation, interview evidence, and recent studies on the dissemination of Shanxi mountain songs, the discussion is organized around six themes: transmission, performance contexts, continuity and preservation, contemporary adaptation, challenges, and thematic synthesis. The analysis shows that Shanqu remains culturally significant, but its survival increasingly depends on hybrid forms of inheritance that combine community practice, education, cultural policy, and digital media.

4.1 Transmission of Shanqu

4.1.1 Modes of Transmission

The transmission of Shanqu has shifted from mainly oral and community-based learning to a mixed system that includes informal practice, school-based teaching, cultural events, and media circulation. In the past, singers learned through imitation during labor, village gatherings, and seasonal activities. In the present, these traditional pathways have weakened, so transmission increasingly depends on organized activities such as workshops, festivals, and cultural programs. Recent dissemination research on Shanxi mountain songs shows that public familiarity remains limited and that audiences often encounter Shanqu through educational environments, cultural events, and traditional or digital media rather than through everyday rural life. This indicates that transmission still continues, but it now operates through mediated and institutional channels more than through natural community immersion.

A more detailed view of transmission shows that this shift is not only institutional but also generational. Older singers often learned Shanqu by absorbing it as part of everyday life: they heard songs in agricultural settings, at communal gatherings, in seasonal movement across mountain routes, and through repeated participation in local social events. Learning therefore took place in a highly contextual environment in which melody, dialect, gesture, and emotional usage were acquired together. Younger learners, by contrast, are more likely to meet Shanqu in separated formats such as classroom demonstration, competition repertory, curated recordings, or online excerpts. This means that the modern learner may gain faster access to repertory and technical models, but may not automatically inherit the social meaning and spontaneous flexibility that traditionally shaped the genre.

Mediated transmission also changes the balance between memory and standardization. In oral practice, singers once adjusted wording, timing, and ornamentation according to place, audience, and personal experience. In mediated forms, however, learners may repeatedly imitate one recorded version, one competition-style arrangement, or one authoritative performer. This can support technical clarity and protect representative examples, yet it may also narrow the space for local variation. For Shanqu, whose identity has long depended on living flexibility rather than exact repetition, the spread of fixed reference models presents both an advantage and a risk. It makes the genre teachable in formal settings, but it can gradually reduce the diversity that historically sustained authenticity in oral tradition.

4.1.2 Key Actors in Inheritance

Several groups now play key roles in the inheritance of Shanqu. Elder singers and recognized practitioners remain essential because they preserve vocal style, dialectal expression, and performance memory. At the same time, teachers, cultural workers, festival organizers, and heritage agencies increasingly shape how the tradition is selected, taught, and presented. Individual performers such as Shi Zhanming also function as cultural mediators: they connect local practice with staged performance and public communication. In contemporary conditions, inheritance no longer depends on one

group alone; it depends on cooperation among communities, institutions, and representative performers.

Families and local communities still matter, even if their role has become less dominant than before. In many traditional folk-song environments, children first encountered singing through relatives, neighbors, and community elders rather than through formal instruction. That intimate transmission model is now less stable because of migration, changing labor patterns, and reduced use of folk singing in everyday social interaction. Even so, when intergenerational contact remains active, family and village memory continue to provide an irreplaceable foundation for pronunciation habits, local repertoire recognition, and emotional understanding. Community-based familiarity often gives singers a sense of stylistic instinct that cannot be fully reproduced through textbooks or digital recordings alone.

Institutional actors have become increasingly influential in determining what parts of Shanqu are preserved, displayed, and taught. Schools may introduce selected songs in music education to support cultural identity and heritage awareness, while local cultural departments and heritage programs provide performance opportunities, documentation, and policy recognition. The growing inclusion of intangible cultural heritage in educational and public-cultural work has created new channels through which younger generations can encounter local traditions in more systematic ways. At the same time, representative performers such as Shi Zhanming become especially significant because they embody a performable model of style that can travel beyond its original locality. Their visibility helps attract new learners and audiences, but it also means that individual performance models can become disproportionately influential in defining what counts as “authentic” Shanqu (Shanxi Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, 2023).

4.1.3 Learning Processes and Knowledge Transmission

The learning process of Shanqu combines listening, imitation, repetition, and contextual understanding. In traditional settings, knowledge was passed on through participation in real social situations, so learners acquired repertoire, pronunciation,

timing, and expressive style together. In contemporary settings, learning is more segmented: students may study melody, lyrics, diction, or stage presentation separately in classrooms or workshops, then reinforce learning through recordings and online materials. This has improved accessibility, but it has also reduced the embodied, context-rich experience that once linked song, place, and social life. Therefore, current knowledge transmission is broader in reach but often thinner in lived context.

An important aspect of the learning process is embodied imitation. In oral tradition, learners do not simply memorize melody; they imitate breathing habits, vocal attack, resonance focus, pronunciation, bodily stance, timing, and expressive pacing. These dimensions are difficult to separate in actual folk performance because they arise from repeated participation rather than from abstract explanation. Formal teaching can identify technical components more clearly, but it may also fragment them into isolated exercises. As a result, contemporary learners may know what breath support or diction means in theoretical terms, yet still need extensive listening and imitation before they can internalize the integrated vocal logic of Shanqu.

Dialect is especially important in this process of transmission. Because Shanqu is closely tied to regional speech patterns, the learning of text and melody cannot be completely separated. Local pronunciation affects vowel color, accent, phrase length, and the emotional shape of the vocal line. When learners no longer grow up hearing dialect in daily life, they may still reproduce the words, but the relationship between language and melody can become less organic. This is one reason why transmission today requires more than archival preservation; it also requires opportunities for learners to encounter dialect, local aesthetics, and performance practice together as parts of one cultural system.

4.2 Performance Contexts of Shanqu

4.2.1 Performance Spaces and Occasions

In the present period, Shanqu is performed in both residual traditional settings and new formal contexts. Local gatherings, temple or seasonal events, and small community activities still preserve some older practices, but public performance now more often occurs on festival stages, in schools, at heritage events, and through broadcast or online platforms. This change shows that performance occasions have moved from spontaneous daily-life situations toward curated and representational settings. The result is greater visibility but weaker connection to the original social environment in which the genre developed.

Historically, performance space shaped musical behavior directly. Outdoor environments, mountain routes, work areas, and open village settings encouraged a highly projected vocal style, flexible rhythm, and immediate communication with listeners who were often also participants. In such contexts, song was embedded in social action rather than separated from it. Contemporary stages alter these conditions. Microphones, time limits, programmed sequencing, and visual presentation encourage clearer segmentation of repertory and more controlled delivery. The singer now often performs toward an audience arranged in front of the stage or behind a screen rather than within a circular or communal environment. This spatial change affects not only where Shanqu is heard, but also how it is vocally shaped and socially understood.

Festival and heritage-event performance has become one of the most visible contemporary settings for Shanqu. In these settings, the genre is often framed as a representative sign of local culture, intangible heritage, or regional tourism. Such framing is valuable because it increases recognition and offers public legitimacy. However, it also changes expectations: songs may be selected for symbolic value, performance length may be shortened for programming needs, and vocal delivery may be optimized for stage impact rather than social interaction. Consequently, performance context

now often emphasizes Shanqu as a cultural emblem, whereas earlier contexts emphasized its practical and interpersonal functions.

4.2.2 Audience Characteristics and Participation

Audience structure has become more diverse. Local audiences still value dialect, emotional directness, and cultural familiarity, while broader national audiences often focus on vocal skill, stage effect, and heritage symbolism. Younger audiences increasingly encounter Shanqu through short-form digital content, which expands access but can reduce depth of engagement. Participation has also changed: in traditional contexts the boundary between singer and listener was fluid, but in most contemporary contexts audiences are primarily observers. This means that reception now depends more on presentation and media framing than on communal interaction.

Different audience groups now approach Shanqu with different listening habits. For community elders or locally rooted audiences, value may lie in dialect authenticity, remembered repertory, and the singer's relationship to familiar expressive norms. For students and heritage audiences, Shanqu may be appreciated as an example of traditional culture worth preserving. For online viewers, meanwhile, attention may focus on immediacy, novelty, technical brilliance, or emotional intensity compressed into short digital formats. These layered audience expectations mean that performers often communicate across different cultural horizons at once. A contemporary performance may therefore need to sound regionally convincing to local listeners while also remaining accessible to audiences with little prior knowledge of the tradition.

Another important change concerns participation. In many traditional folk settings, listeners were not entirely separate from performers. They might respond verbally, join refrains, recognize local references immediately, or later become singers themselves. In modern presentation, especially on formal stages and digital platforms, the audience is more often positioned as spectator or consumer. This reduces participatory intimacy and can weaken the social reciprocity that once helped sustain oral transmission. At the same time, new forms of response-such as comments, sharing, digital circulation, or educational follow-up-create different, mediated forms of engagement. The challenge

is that mediated participation rarely reproduces the full communal texture of face-to-face musical life.

4.2.3 Relationship with Social and Cultural Contexts

Shanqu remains closely related to social and cultural context, but the nature of that relationship has changed. Formerly, it functioned within agricultural life, interpersonal exchange, and community ritual. Today, it more often represents local identity, regional culture, and intangible heritage in formal or mediated contexts. This shift from practical use to cultural representation does not mean the tradition has disappeared; rather, its meaning has been redefined. In contemporary society, Shanqu survives by linking memory of local life with new social spaces such as schools, festivals, tourism, and online communication.

This redefinition is closely connected with the wider heritage environment of Shanxi. Public attention to intangible cultural heritage in the province has grown through official recognition, policy frameworks, and institution-building. Reports on Shanxi's intangible heritage work describe both achievements and continuing challenges, including inheritance, social participation, and the integration of cultural resources with contemporary development agendas (Shanxi Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, 2023). In this environment, Shanqu is increasingly interpreted not only as a folk practice but also as a valuable cultural resource that can support education, local identity, public culture, and tourism. This creates opportunities for visibility and protection, but also encourages the genre to function symbolically in settings far removed from the everyday life in which it originally operated.

Yet representational status should not be interpreted only negatively. Even when Shanqu is no longer embedded in the same agricultural and interpersonal routines, it still carries memory of those worlds. Contemporary performances can reactivate images of place, labor, migration, longing, and regional speech, allowing audiences to encounter forms of historical and emotional knowledge that are otherwise fading from ordinary life. In this sense, the song tradition now mediates between remembered local experience

and new public-cultural settings. Its social role has changed, but it still performs cultural work by making regional memory audible in the present.

4.3 Continuity and Preservation of Shanqu

4.3.1 Factors Supporting Continuity

The continuity of Shanqu is supported by several interconnected factors. These include the persistence of elder practitioners, institutional recognition under heritage policy, educational inclusion, festivals and cultural events, and the growing use of recording and digital dissemination. Recent research on Shanxi mountain song dissemination suggests that educational and cultural-event channels remain especially important for public contact with the genre. Although continuity is no longer guaranteed by everyday village life, these new support systems have created alternative pathways through which the tradition can remain visible and learnable.

Policy support has become an especially important factor in continuity because it provides an official framework within which transmission can be recognized and funded. Research on the spatial distribution and influencing factors of intangible cultural heritage in Shanxi Province emphasizes that cultural-environment factors and the strengthening of cultural institutions are significant to sustainable development and inheritance (Zhao et al., 2026). This broader finding is relevant to Shanqu because the tradition increasingly depends on the presence of institutions that can organize archives, educational activities, public events, and protection measures. Where institutional support is weak, continuity depends much more heavily on individual initiative and local memory alone.

Digital tools further strengthen continuity by allowing songs, performances, and contextual information to be stored and circulated more widely. Studies on digitization in Shanxi note that digital collection, intelligent inheritance, and interactive content can modernize cultural preservation and broaden public access (Zhou, et al., 2024). For Shanqu, this means that performances can be documented before they disappear,

learners can revisit models repeatedly, and public awareness can extend beyond local geography. Nevertheless, documentation alone cannot guarantee continuity. If songs survive only as archived media without being sung, interpreted, and socially reactivated, preservation becomes static rather than living. The continued presence of active practitioners therefore remains essential even in a highly mediated environment.

4.3.2 Maintaining Musical and Cultural Identity

Maintaining musical and cultural identity depends on preserving core features even as contexts change. Important markers of identity include high and penetrating vocal tone, flexible melodic shaping, close relation between language and melody, use of local dialect, and strong emotional directness. However, preservation does not mean complete fixity. In contemporary practice, identity is maintained through selective adaptation: performers may adjust staging, duration, or presentation, but they still retain recognizable vocal color, melodic style, and regional expressive character. Thus, continuity depends on keeping stylistic essence while allowing practical adaptation.

The question of identity is therefore best understood through core stylistic markers rather than through complete reproduction of former contexts. In the case of Shanqu, these markers include the relation of melody to dialect, the bright and carrying vocal color, emotionally direct delivery, and a degree of rhythmic and ornamental flexibility. If these elements remain audible and meaningful, adaptation does not necessarily destroy identity. Conversely, if they are neutralized in the name of accessibility or standardized performance, the tradition may continue outwardly while losing its regional substance. Preservation thus depends on recognizing which musical and linguistic features are essential and which presentational features can change more freely.

This also means that authenticity should not be confused with rigid sameness. Folk traditions have historically survived through repetition with variation, not through exact mechanical copying. Singers shaped songs according to breath, local speech, audience response, and circumstance. In modern preservation, however, codification sometimes becomes necessary for teaching, competition, or archival classification. The

challenge is to codify enough to support learning and recognition without freezing the genre into a museum-like form. A sustainable model of continuity must therefore preserve stylistic principles while still allowing performers room for responsive interpretation.

4.4 Contemporary Adaptation of Shanqu

4.4.1 Changes in Modes of Presentation

The presentation of Shanqu has changed from spontaneous, context-linked singing to more structured and representational formats. Contemporary performances are often rehearsed, staged, and shaped by program timing, audience expectation, and visual presentation. This has reduced some improvisational freedom, but it has also made the genre more portable across schools, festivals, and public cultural events. In short, the music is now more often presented as heritage performance than as everyday communal action.

Presentation today is shaped not only by sound but also by visual and programmatic design. Costuming, stage lighting, formal introductions, thematic curation, and event branding all influence how audiences interpret Shanqu before a single phrase is sung. In folk settings of the past, the authority of the song came mainly from situation and shared knowledge. In modern cultural programs, authority is often supported by institutional framing: the song may be introduced as heritage, regional art, or representative culture. This framing can elevate prestige and improve legibility for wider audiences, but it can also distance the performance from the ordinary social conditions that once made the song feel immediate and communal.

Modern presentation also creates selection pressures. Repertoire that adapts easily to stage length, clear emotional contrast, or media circulation may be performed more frequently than songs whose impact depends on local context or extended participation. Over time, this can produce a narrower public image of the tradition, centered on the most presentable items rather than the full range of historical practice.

As a result, adaptation can inadvertently privilege certain song types, vocal manners, or performance styles while leaving less visible forms underrepresented in contemporary cultural memory.

4.4.2 Application in New Media and Contexts

New media and emerging contexts have become important to the present life of Shanqu. Online video, livestreaming, and social platforms allow performances to circulate beyond Shanxi and attract younger audiences. Research on dissemination indicates that communication now depends on multiple channels, including education, cultural programs, broadcast media, and digital platforms. At the same time, digital presentation encourages shorter formats, clearer staging, and stronger visual appeal. Therefore, new media helps preserve and publicize Shanqu, but it also changes how the music is framed, consumed, and evaluated.

Available dissemination research supports this view of mediated adaptation. A 2024 study on Shanxi mountain songs found that familiarity and popularity among respondents were generally low, and that people more often encountered Shanqu and related genres through cultural events, educational environments, and traditional media such as television than through everyday community life (Wang, Razali, and Musib, 2024). This finding is important because it confirms that contemporary contact with the genre is increasingly routed through organized channels. It also suggests that adaptation to media and education is not optional but central to the present survival of the tradition.

Digital circulation is especially valuable for younger audiences because it lowers the threshold for initial access. Short videos, livestream clips, and online teaching materials can introduce the sound of Shanqu to people who might never encounter it locally. At the same time, digital platforms tend to reward immediacy, visual distinctiveness, and brevity. This can encourage the circulation of striking moments-high notes, emotional climaxes, or iconic costumes-more than deeper contextual understanding. Therefore, digital media increases exposure but does not automatically increase literacy. For adaptation to be sustainable, online presentation needs to be connected with

explanation, teaching, and opportunities for deeper engagement beyond the first impression.

4.5 Challenges Affecting Shanqu

4.5.1 Transmission Problems

The most serious transmission problems are the weakening of natural community learning, the aging of practitioners, and the reduced use of local dialect among younger generations. Modern education, migration, and new media habits have changed how cultural knowledge is acquired. As a result, Shanqu is now often learned outside its original environment, which makes technical access easier but weakens contextual depth. Another problem is that preservation efforts may favor fixed examples of the tradition, while actual folk practice depends on variation, memory, and responsiveness.

The weakening of intergenerational continuity is particularly serious because Shanqu has historically depended on repeated contact with singers who embodied the style in everyday life. When younger people leave local areas for study or work, or when family and village settings no longer use singing in regular social interaction, the chain of informal observation becomes fragile. Even when formal programs exist, they often provide limited exposure compared with the cumulative effect of lifelong community hearing. This means that transmission problems are not simply a matter of repertory loss; they involve the thinning of the sensory and social environment through which stylistic instinct once developed.

Dialect erosion intensifies this problem. As broader linguistic standardization expands in education and media, younger singers may understand the cultural value of local speech without fully mastering its phonetic nuance. Yet in Shanqu, pronunciation is not an external addition to melody; it shapes phrasing, tone color, and expressive identity from within. A further paradox emerges when preservation projects favor standardized teaching versions. Such versions may support access and formal learning, but they can also smooth out local variation and make the tradition sound more generic. Thus, a

strategy designed to save the genre can unintentionally weaken the very features that distinguish it.

4.5.2 Social Change and Audience Transformation

Social change has transformed both the environment of performance and the composition of audiences. Rural labor patterns, village social structure, and face-to-face communal gatherings no longer dominate cultural life as before. At the same time, audiences are now broader, more urban, and more media-oriented. Many listeners approach Shanqu as heritage performance, staged art, or online content rather than as part of everyday social life. This has increased exposure but also changed the criteria by which the genre is appreciated, often shifting attention from social function to aesthetic display.

Urbanization contributes to this transformation not only by moving people physically but also by reshaping cultural value systems. In urban and media-oriented environments, audiences often encounter many styles at once and evaluate performance through categories such as professionalism, stage charisma, originality, and shareability. Folk-song traditions then compete for attention within a crowded cultural field. Under such conditions, Shanqu may gain recognition as a symbol of regional distinctiveness, but it may also be judged according to expectations derived from popular entertainment or formal concert culture. This changes the criteria of appreciation and can pressure performers to intensify visual presentation or streamline repertory in order to remain legible to newer audiences.

At the same time, the decline of participatory village culture reduces the collective memory that once supported interpretation. When audiences no longer share the local references, labor imagery, dialect humor, and emotional codes embedded in lyrics, the song may still be admired aesthetically but understood less deeply. This does not mean that contemporary audiences are indifferent; rather, it means that the social knowledge needed for full reception is less widely distributed. The result is a widening gap between surface appreciation and culturally grounded understanding.

4.5.3 Future Trends

Future trends suggest that Shanqu will continue through hybrid preservation rather than through a full return to former rural conditions. Education, heritage policy, digital documentation, curated festivals, and cross-platform communication will remain important. At the same time, the long-term health of the tradition will depend on whether these systems can preserve dialect, stylistic nuance, and participatory memory rather than only producing standardized stage versions. The future of Shanqu therefore lies in balancing accessibility with cultural depth, and innovation with regional identity.

A sustainable future for Shanqu will likely require combined strategies rather than a single preservation model. Community-based transmission remains important where it is still possible, but it must be supported by schools, cultural institutions, documentation, and carefully designed media work. Educational practice is especially promising because it can connect younger generations with local identity while also providing structured access to melody, diction, and cultural background. At the same time, revitalization strategies need to avoid reducing the tradition to a purely decorative symbol. Long-term sustainability depends on cultivating informed singers and listeners, not only producing occasional heritage events.

For this reason, the central strategic issue is balance. Innovation is necessary if the genre is to remain visible in modern cultural life, yet innovation must remain accountable to regional style, dialectal identity, and the emotional logic of the tradition. If adaptation proceeds without stylistic grounding, Shanqu risks becoming a generic “folk” display. If preservation rejects all adaptation, the genre may lose relevance and audience access. The future therefore depends on selective revitalization: using modern tools and institutions to support inheritance while keeping core musical and cultural features intact.

4.6 Synthesis of the Current Status of Shanqu

4.6.1 Thematic Synthesis

Thematic analysis shows that the current status of Shanqu is defined by simultaneous continuity and transformation. The genre still preserves recognizable musical identity and cultural value, but its transmission is no longer sustained mainly by everyday community life. Instead, it now depends on a network of practitioners, schools, cultural institutions, media channels, and heritage initiatives. Performance has shifted from functional use toward representation, yet this shift has also opened new opportunities for survival. Overall, Shanqu remains a living tradition, but one that now survives through adaptation, mediation, and selective preservation rather than through unchanged continuity.

Across all six themes, one pattern becomes especially clear: the present condition of Shanqu cannot be described simply as decline or survival. Instead, it represents a process of cultural reorganization. Transmission has moved from immersion to mixed systems; performance has moved from everyday function to staged and mediated representation; preservation increasingly depends on policy, education, and digital support; adaptation has opened access while also changing aesthetic priorities; and the most serious challenges concern the weakening of dialect-rich, community-based, participatory culture. Yet none of these changes has eliminated the genre's identity. Rather, they have relocated the places and mechanisms through which that identity is maintained.

This synthesis also clarifies why the analysis of a representative performer is necessary. If Shanqu now survives through hybrid channels and selective preservation, then style in actual performance becomes one of the most important carriers of continuity. The current status of the tradition cannot be understood only through policy, dissemination, or education; it must also be understood through the vocal practices that make the genre recognizable in sound. For that reason, the findings in this chapter provide the cultural foundation for Chapter V, where the singing techniques of Shi Zhanming are examined

as a concrete mechanism through which regional style is preserved, communicated, and recontextualized in contemporary society.

CHAPTER 5

An Analysis of the Singing Techniques of Shanqu by Shi Zhanming

This chapter presents a concise analysis of Shi Zhanming's singing techniques in Shanqu performance. The discussion is organized around seven dimensions: vocal production and resonance, breath control, pitch accuracy and register coordination, diction and expressive delivery, emotional expression and ornamentation, falsetto and modal voice transition, and an overall summary. The chapter argues that Shi Zhanming's artistry lies not in isolated technical effects, but in the coordination of vocal control with the regional aesthetics of Shanqu.

Shi Zhanming serves as an important contemporary model because his singing preserves the bright, penetrating, and emotionally direct qualities associated with Shanqu while also showing disciplined breath use, stable registration, and refined expressive control. For this reason, his performance practice provides a useful case through which technical analysis and folk-style interpretation can be examined together.

The analysis below considers each technical dimension in relation to both vocal function and Shanqu style.

5.1 Vocal Production and Resonance Techniques

Vocal production and resonance form the acoustic foundation of Shi Zhanming's Shanqu singing. His voice is characterized by a clear and bright tone, efficient projection, and a resonance pattern that supports both outdoor folk aesthetics and contemporary staged performance. Rather than sounding overly manufactured, his vocal production remains natural while still demonstrating control of timbre and carrying power.

5.1.1 Vocal Tone Production

Based on the field data collected in this study, Shi Zhanming's vocal tone production can be interpreted as natural, focused, and stylistically appropriate to Shanqu. Evidence from the interview with Shi Zhanming, the researcher's observation of his performance of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You*, and the observation of his lecture on Shanqu indicates that his tone remains open, bright, and stable without sounding excessively pressed. During performance observation, the vocal line projected clearly even in higher phrases, while the sound retained a direct and unforced quality. These field-based materials suggest that his vocal tone production depends on balanced phonation and controlled projection rather than on heavy operatic weight. Therefore, vocal tone production in his singing should be understood as a practical technique that supports the bright, communicative, and emotionally immediate sound world of Shanqu, as confirmed by the interview, lecture, and performance-observation data.

5.1.2 Resonance Placement

Shi Zhanming's resonance placement can also be interpreted through the field data collected in this study. From the observation of his performance of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You*, the voice projected with a forward and concentrated sound that remained clear in the upper range. Observation of his lecture on Shanqu further supports this interpretation, because the demonstrated singing style emphasized vocal focus and carrying power without harshness. In addition, the interview with Shi Zhanming provides contextual support for understanding resonance as part of practical folk-singing technique rather than as an abstract vocal principle. These field-based materials suggest that resonance placement in his singing functions to preserve both clarity of text and brightness of tone. Therefore, his resonance use should be understood as a field-observed technical resource that supports the penetrating yet natural sound associated with Shanqu performance.

5.1.3 Folk Vocal Aesthetics

From the perspective of field data, Shi Zhanming's folk vocal aesthetics are evident in the balance between strength, brightness, and naturalness in his singing.

The researcher's observation of his performance of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You* shows that the vocal sound remained emotionally direct and regionally characteristic rather than operatically heavy. Observation of his lecture on Shanqu further indicates that this aesthetic quality is closely related to the stylistic expectations of the genre, especially the preservation of plainness, openness, and expressive immediacy. The interview with Shi Zhanming also supports the interpretation that his sound aims to preserve folk identity while functioning effectively in contemporary performance. Therefore, the folk vocal aesthetics in his singing should be understood not as a generalized vocal ideal, but as



a style confirmed by the study's interview, lecture, and performance-observation evidence.

Figure 5.1 Example of folk vocal aesthetics in Shanqu singing

Figure 5.1 illustrates folk vocal aesthetics in Shi Zhanming's *Shanqu* performance through the coordination of strength, brightness, and natural vocal quality. In relation to subsection 5.1.3, the figure emphasizes that expressive immediacy, regional character, and open vocal projection are preserved through the integrated use of vocal production and resonance.

5.2 Breath Control Techniques

Breath control is a central technical resource in Shi Zhanming's singing because Shanqu phrases often require sustained projection, long melodic arcs, and high-register continuity. His breath use supports not only tone stability but also phrase structure and expressive timing. In this way, breathing functions as both physiological support and musical organization.

5.2.1 Breath Support

Based on the field data collected in this study, Shi Zhanming's breath support can be interpreted as stable and well coordinated rather than shallow or forceful. Evidence from the interview with Shi Zhanming, the researcher's observation of his lecture on Shanqu , and the performance observation of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You* indicates that his singing maintains a steady vocal foundation even in phrases that rise into the upper range. During observation, the tone remained supported without visible collapse at phrase endings, and the sound did not suggest excessive throat pressure. These field-based findings imply that breath support in his singing functions as an underlying technical base that allows projection, tonal steadiness, and stylistic openness to remain balanced. In this sense, breath support is not only a physiological mechanism but also a practical condition for preserving the bright, resilient, and emotionally direct sound associated with Shanqu, as evidenced in the study's interview and performance-observation materials.

More specifically, this kind of breath support appears to rely on coordinated expansion and controlled release rather than on muscular pushing. In practical vocal terms, the lower torso provides a stable base from which airflow can be sustained across long phrases, especially when the melodic line ascends and demands increased projection. This is important in Shanqu singing because upper-range phrases can easily become tight or unstable if the singer depends primarily on throat effort. By grounding the tone in stable support, Shi Zhanming is able to maintain brightness and carrying power while avoiding an overly pressed sound.

Breath support also influences the musical shape of the performance. When the airflow remains steady, phrase endings can be completed without collapse, dynamic emphasis can be adjusted more flexibly, and transitions into high-register tones become smoother and more secure. In Shi Zhanming's case, the listener hears not only physical support but also musical confidence: the phrase continues with direction, the tone remains energized, and expressive intensity can increase without sacrificing clarity. This suggests that breath support in his singing is not merely a hidden physiological mechanism, but a major factor that helps transform technical efficiency into the open, resilient, and emotionally direct sound world associated with Shanqu.

5.2.2 Breath Management in Phrase Structure

In phrase structure, breath management in Shi Zhanming's singing can be understood from the field data collected in this study, especially the interview with Shi Zhanming, observation of his lecture on Shanqu and the researcher's review of his performance of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You* These field materials show that breathing is not taken at random, but is coordinated with meaningful textual units and with the natural rise and release of the melodic line. During performance observation, inhalation appeared to be prepared before important lyric segments and before phrases that moved upward or required stronger projection, rather than interrupting the line in the middle of expressive delivery. This suggests that breath planning in his singing serves a structural function: it supports the beginning, expansion, climax, and cadence of the phrase as one continuous unit. In practical terms, such management helps preserve verbal clarity at the opening of the phrase, maintain steady airflow through the central melodic span, and reserve sufficient support for phrase endings so that the line does not collapse before the expressive point is completed. The field evidence also indicates that this organization is especially important in Shanqu, because long phrases, high melodic direction, and dialect-based text require the singer to balance continuity of sound with intelligibility of words. Therefore, breath management in phrase structure should be interpreted as a practical performance strategy in which breathing supports not only vocal stability but also the internal architecture of the phrase, including its

textual coherence, melodic direction, and emotional pacing, as confirmed by the study's interview, lecture, and performance-observation data.

5.2.3 Breath and Vocal Continuity

The field data collected in this study further show that breath and vocal continuity are closely integrated in Shi Zhanming's singing practice. Evidence from the researcher's observation of his performance of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You*, the observation of his lecture on Shanqu, and the interview with Shi Zhanming indicates that controlled breathing supports the maintenance of an unbroken vocal line across extended phrases, ornamental movement, and changes of register. During performance observation, the continuity of tone was preserved even when the melody required upward motion, sustained high notes, or subtle inflection, suggesting that airflow was regulated gradually rather than released unevenly. This continuity is especially important in Shanqu because the style depends on long melodic motion, bright projection, and the close relationship between text and phrase direction. If breath is poorly managed, the line can fragment, ornaments can sound disconnected, and transitions between pitch areas may become abrupt. In Shi Zhanming's singing, however, breath appears to function as a linking force that keeps the phrase coherent from onset to release, allowing the sound to remain connected while still retaining expressive flexibility. The field evidence also suggests that such continuity is not only technical but stylistic, because uninterrupted vocal flow helps preserve the natural, direct, and regionally grounded character of Shanqu performance. Therefore, breath and vocal continuity in his singing should be understood as a field-observed coordination of airflow, phrase connection, and expressive line that sustains both vocal efficiency and stylistic authenticity.

5.3 Pitch Accuracy and Register Coordination Techniques

Pitch accuracy and register coordination are essential in Shi Zhanming's singing because the melodic design of Shanqu frequently rises into an exposed upper range. His technique shows that accurate intonation in this style depends not only on ear training but also on breath, resonance, and smooth register management. Technical stability therefore, supports both melodic clarity and expressive credibility.

5.3.1 Pitch Management

Shi Zhanming's pitch management can be understood clearly from the field data collected in this study, especially the researcher's observation of his performance of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You*, the observation of his lecture on *Shanqu*, and the interview with Shi Zhanming. These field materials indicate that pitch accuracy in his singing is maintained through stable control of tonal center, secure approach to interval movement, and careful adjustment in the upper range. During performance observation, the pitch center remained clear in exposed melodic passages, including phrases that rise rapidly or sustain near climactic points. This suggests that intonation is stabilized through advance preparation of breath, resonance focus, and phrase direction rather than through corrective effort after instability occurs. Observation of his lecture on *Shanqu* further supports this interpretation because the demonstrated examples showed that accurate pitch depends on maintaining a focused tonal line while preserving the natural folk quality of the voice. The interview with Shi Zhanming also provides contextual evidence that pitch in *Shanqu* performance is closely related to practical vocal control and stylistic appropriateness rather than abstract exactness alone. In practical terms, effective pitch management in his singing involves secure interval placement, maintenance of tonal center across sustained notes, and coordinated breath-resonance adjustment to avoid sagging, overshooting, or loss of focus in the upper register. This is especially important in *Shanqu* because the melodic design often combines upward motion, open projection, and dialect-based textual shaping, all of which can affect intonational stability if not managed in a unified way. Therefore, pitch management in Shi Zhanming's singing

should be understood as a field-observed process in which listening, breath, resonance, and melodic intention work together to preserve both pitch accuracy and the expressive credibility of *Shanqu* melody.



Figure 5.2 Example of pitch accuracy and register coordination in Shanqu singing

Figure 5.2 illustrates pitch accuracy and register coordination in Shi Zhanming's *Shanqu* performance through the coordination of tonal center, interval control, and smooth upper-register adjustment. In relation to Section 5.3, the figure emphasizes that stable intonation, connected register movement, and high-register continuity are preserved through the integrated use of breath, resonance, and phrase direction.

5.3.2 Register Coordination

Register coordination in Shi Zhanming's singing is also confirmed by the field evidence collected in this study. From the researcher's observation of his performance of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You*, the voice moved from the middle to the upper range without abrupt breaks, suggesting gradual adjustment of resonance, breath support, and vocal weight rather than sudden mechanical shifting. Observation of his lecture on Shanqu further supports this interpretation, because the demonstrated singing style showed continuity across changing pitch levels while maintaining a stable tonal identity. The interview with Shi Zhanming also provides contextual support for understanding register coordination as part of practical folk-singing control rather than as an isolated technical exercise. These field materials indicate that coordination between registers in his singing depends on balancing firmness and lightness so that the upper range can

emerge with sufficient brightness and carrying power while the vocal line remains connected to the middle register. In practical terms, such coordination helps avoid audible register breaks, prevents unnecessary throat pressure, and supports accurate intonation when melodic phrases rise quickly or sustain in an exposed tessitura. This is especially important in Shanqu because the style often demands a penetrating upper sound without losing naturalness or regional vocal color. Therefore, register coordination in Shi Zhanming's performance should be understood as a field-based technical process through which breath, resonance, and tonal continuity are adjusted together, allowing the upper range to develop naturally while preserving one coherent and stylistically appropriate vocal line.

5.3.3 Stability of High-Register Singing

The stability of Shi Zhanming's high-register singing is clearly reflected in the field materials collected for this research. Observation of his performance of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You* shows that upper notes remained bright and controlled without sounding forced. Observation of his lecture on Shanqu further confirms that high-register production in this style depends on balanced support and resonance rather than on excessive pressure. The interview with Shi Zhanming also provides contextual support for understanding upper-range singing as part of practical style management in Shanqu. Therefore, the stability of his high-register singing should be interpreted as a field-



observed result of controlled breath, resonance focus, and stylistic vocal economy.

Figure 5.3 Example of high-register stability in Shanqu singing

Figure 5.3 illustrates high-register stability in Shi Zhanming's *Shanqu* performance through the coordination of breath support, resonance focus, and controlled upper-range projection. In relation to subsection 5.3.3, the figure emphasizes that brightness, pitch stability, and vocal continuity in the high register are preserved through efficient technical support rather than excessive pressure.

5.4 Diction and Expressive Delivery Techniques

Diction and expressive delivery are crucial in Shi Zhanming's singing because Shanqu depends strongly on the interaction between local speech, melodic contour, and emotional communication. His performances show that textual meaning is carried not only by words themselves but by pronunciation, articulation, phrasing, and vocal emphasis. Thus, vocal delivery becomes a major carrier of regional identity.

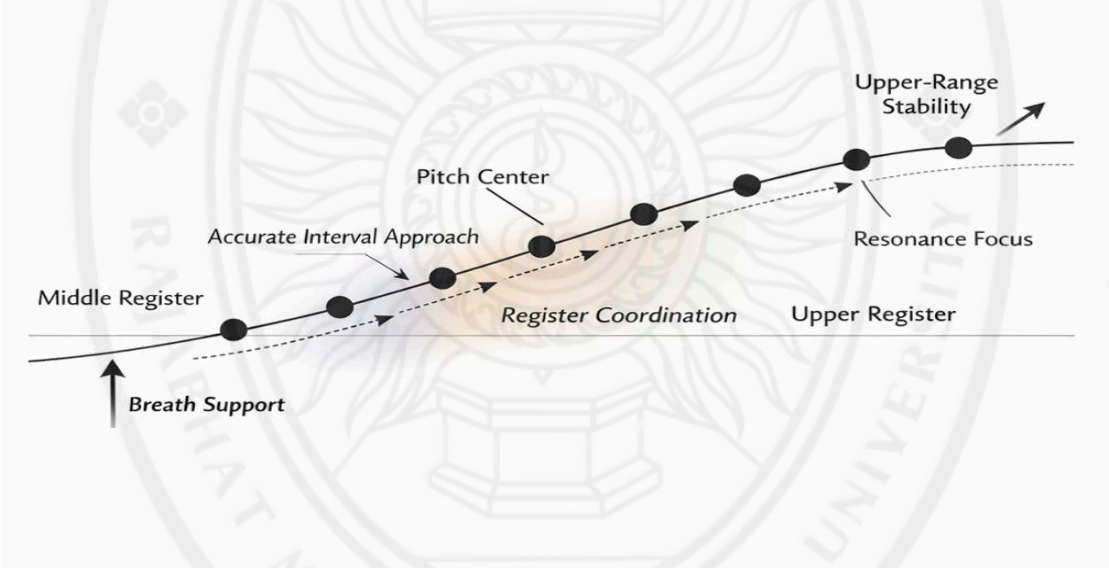


Figure 5.4 Example of diction and expressive delivery in Shanqu singing

Figure 5.4 illustrates diction and expressive delivery in Shi Zhanming's *Shanqu* performance through the coordination of Shanxi dialect pronunciation, articulation, and phrase-based interpretation. In relation to Section 5.4, the figure emphasizes that textual clarity, regional speech character, and expressive pacing are preserved through the integrated use of diction and musical shaping.

5.4.1 Use of Shanxi Dialect Pronunciation

Shi Zhanming's use of Shanxi dialect pronunciation is central to the authenticity of his Shanqu performance, as confirmed by the field evidence collected in this study. The interview with Shi Zhanming, the researcher's observation of his performance of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You*, and the observation of his lecture on Shanqu all indicate that dialect pronunciation in his singing functions as more than a linguistic surface feature. It directly affects vowel color, syllabic rhythm, textual accent, and tonal inflection, all of which interact closely with melodic contour and expressive phrasing. During performance observation, local pronunciation remained audible even when the vocal line rose into a bright and projected upper range, suggesting that dialect was preserved as a structural element of style rather than neutralized for the sake of generalized stage clarity. Observation of the lecture further supports this interpretation because the demonstrated singing style showed that the regional sound of Shanqu depends on the close alignment between local speech habits and musical shaping. In practical terms, the use of Shanxi dialect pronunciation helps maintain the natural relationship between word tone and melody, supports the distinctive rhythmic profile of the text, and preserves the emotional immediacy associated with regional folk expression. This is especially important because if the dialect were excessively standardized, the musical line could lose part of its local color, textual energy, and stylistic identity. Therefore, Shi Zhanming's use of Shanxi dialect pronunciation should be understood as a field-observed stylistic practice through which language, melody, and regional authenticity are held together in one coherent Shanqu performance tradition.

5.4.2 Articulation and Textual Clarity

Articulation and textual clarity in Shi Zhanming's singing can be understood more fully through the field evidence collected in this study. The interview with Shi Zhanming, the researcher's observation of his performance of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You*, and the observation of his lecture on Shanqu all indicate that clear textual delivery in his singing depends on the coordination of consonant release, stable vowel shaping, and dialect-sensitive articulation rather than on exaggerated pronunciation. During

performance observation, the text remained intelligible even when the vocal line was highly resonant or included ornamental inflection, suggesting that articulation was preserved within the singing line instead of being sacrificed to projection or expressive intensity. Observation of the lecture further supports this interpretation because the demonstrated style showed that local pronunciation habits influence not only the sound of individual syllables but also rhythmic contour, phrase pacing, and the distribution of verbal emphasis. In practical terms, effective articulation in his singing appears to involve precise but natural consonant onset, continuity of vowel focus across sustained tones, and careful alignment between textual accent and melodic movement. This is especially important in Shanqu because dialect-based lyrics, open vocal projection, and flexible phrasing can easily reduce intelligibility if articulation is weak or overly generalized. Therefore, articulation and textual clarity in Shi Zhanming's performance should be understood as a field-observed stylistic and technical process through which words remain audible, rhythmically alive, and musically integrated, thereby supporting both communication of meaning and preservation of regional vocal identity.

5.4.3 Expressive Interpretation in Performance

Expressive interpretation in Shi Zhanming's performance can be understood more clearly through the field evidence collected in this study. The interview with Shi Zhanming, the researcher's observation of his performance of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You*, and the observation of his lecture on Shanqu all indicate that expressive delivery in his singing depends on the coordination of pacing, verbal emphasis, tonal shading, and phrase contour rather than on exaggerated dramatic effect. During performance observation, emotional meaning unfolded through gradual adjustment of intensity and phrase timing, suggesting that interpretive expression was embedded within the musical line itself. Observation of the lecture further supports this interpretation because the demonstrated singing style showed that textual meaning is not only pronounced but musically shaped through accent, timing, and dynamic nuance. In practical terms, expressive interpretation in his singing appears to involve careful control of phrase pacing, selective emphasis on key words, and tonal variation that clarifies emotional

direction while preserving the natural folk quality of the voice. This is especially important in Shanqu because the genre relies on direct emotional communication and close interaction between language and melody. Therefore, expressive interpretation in Shi Zhanming's performance should be understood as a field-observed artistic process through which linguistic sensitivity and musical phrasing are integrated, allowing the emotional content of the song to emerge in a clear, regionally grounded, and stylistically coherent manner.

An additional point is that diction in Shanqu is not merely a matter of correct pronunciation; it also shapes musical contour and emotional weight. Because local speech rhythm influences syllabic stress, vowel duration, and tonal inflection, the singer's articulation directly affects how the melodic phrase is heard. In Shi Zhanming's performance, clear diction supports not only intelligibility but also the regional sound image of the genre. This means that expressive delivery emerges through the coordination of language and melody rather than through vocal emphasis alone.

5.5 Emotional Expression and Vocal Ornamentation Techniques

Emotional expression and ornamentation are among the most recognizable features of Shi Zhanming's style. In Shanqu, feeling is communicated not through exaggerated drama but through subtle control of tone color, melodic inflection, timing, and ornamented delivery. His singing shows how these devices enrich expression while preserving folk simplicity.

5.5.1 Emotional Communication

Emotional communication in Shi Zhanming's singing emerges through controlled variation of timbre, dynamic weight, and phrase contour. He adjusts vocal intensity according to lyrical meaning, allowing tenderness, longing, or dramatic emphasis to be heard without abandoning the natural tone expected in folk performance. This creates a style that is emotionally persuasive but not theatrical in an operatic sense.

More specifically, emotional communication in his performance depends on how vocal color is aligned with the semantic direction of the text. When the lyric suggests longing, distance, or memory, the tone tends to become lighter and slightly more suspended, while lines expressing certainty or direct emotional declaration are delivered with firmer weight and clearer projection. In this way, timbre functions as an interpretive resource rather than a fixed vocal quality. The listener hears not only a beautiful sound, but a sound that changes in relation to emotional intention. This approach is especially appropriate to *Shanqu*, where emotional truthfulness is often conveyed through direct but nuanced vocal delivery rather than through highly dramatized contrast.

Phrase pacing is also essential to this emotional effect. Shi Zhanming does not communicate feeling by isolated emphatic moments alone; instead, he shapes emotional direction across the full span of the phrase. Slight extension before a climactic word, controlled release at the end of a line, and measured growth in intensity across ascending melodic motion all contribute to the sense that the song is unfolding from within. This produces an expressive style in which emotion is carried by temporal shaping as much as by volume or accent. Such pacing allows the performance to remain connected to folk-song naturalness, because the line continues to sound speech-related and emotionally lived rather than mechanically patterned.

Another important point is that emotional communication in his singing is inseparable from diction and regional style. Because *Shanqu* relies on dialect-based pronunciation and close interaction between speech contour and melody, emotional meaning is intensified through the way words are sounded, stressed, and released. Shi Zhanming's delivery therefore does not separate feeling from technique: emotional communication is produced through the coordination of vocal production, breath support, diction, phrase contour, and stylistically appropriate restraint. For this reason, the emotional force of his singing should be understood as an integrated outcome of technical control and folk aesthetic sensitivity rather than as a purely spontaneous effect.

5.5.2 Ornamentation and Stylistic Expression

Ornamentation and stylistic expression in Shi Zhanming's singing are evident in his use of slides, pitch inflections, and subtle melodic enrichment associated with Chinese folk vocal practice. These features do not function as decoration alone. Instead, they help shape regional color, clarify expressive nuance, and animate the melodic line from within. In his performance, ornamentation remains closely integrated with phrase direction and textual meaning, so that the embellishment supports the identity of *Shanqu* rather than obscuring it.

More specifically, his ornamentation appears in the form of connecting slides into important tones, slight turns around structurally significant pitches, and flexible inflection at phrase endings. These devices can be understood in relation to the Chinese concept of *runqiang*, in which melodic detail is enriched through performance rather than fixed completely in notation. In Shi Zhanming's case, such embellishment is never excessive. The ornaments are measured and context-sensitive, entering the line where they intensify emotional intention, support dialect-based phrasing, or preserve the natural contour of folk singing. Because of this restraint, the listener perceives stylistic vitality rather than vocal display for its own sake.

Another important aspect is that ornamentation in *Shanqu* is inseparable from stylistic expression. The slight bending of pitch, the timing of a slide, or the shaping of a final syllable can signal regional identity as clearly as diction or timbre. In this sense, ornamentation functions as a carrier of folk style. It helps transform a simple melodic outline into a regionally recognizable vocal statement. Shi Zhanming's singing demonstrates this especially well because his ornaments remain connected to breath flow, textual rhythm, and emotional pacing. As a result, stylistic expression emerges not from added complexity alone, but from the careful coordination of melodic nuance with the broader aesthetic principles of *Shanqu*.

5.5.3 Musical Interpretation

His musical interpretation is distinguished by the ability to balance structure and freedom. He respects melodic identity and text meaning, yet allows controlled

flexibility in timing, emphasis, and expressive contour. This interpretive balance is important in Shanqu because the tradition values both recognizable style and living variation in performance.

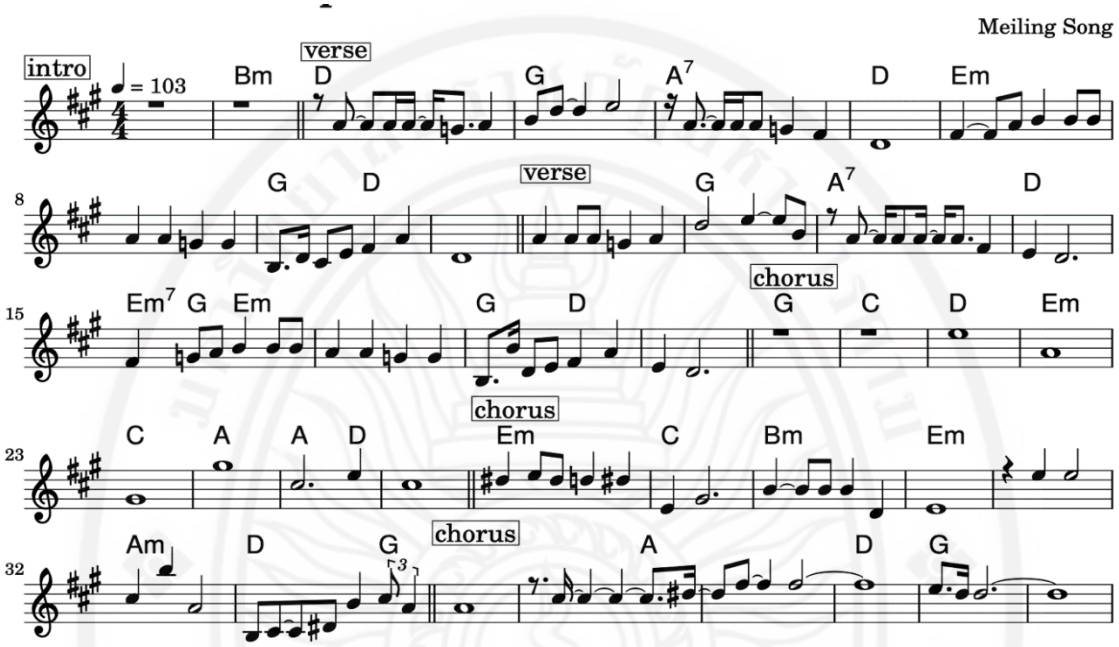


Figure 5.5 Example of emotional expression and vocal ornamentation in Shanqu singing

Figure 5.5 illustrates emotional expression and vocal ornamentation in Shi Zhanming's *Shanqu* performance through the coordination of timbre variation, phrase pacing, slides, and pitch inflection. In relation to Section 5.5, the figure emphasizes that emotional immediacy, stylistic nuance, and regional vocal character are preserved through the integrated use of expressive delivery and ornamented melodic shaping.

5.6 Falsetto and Modal Voice Transition Techniques

Falsetto and modal voice transition is one of the most distinctive aspects of Shi Zhanming's singing because it helps him manage the high tessitura of *Shanqu* while preserving tonal continuity. In his performance, register change is not a technical accident but a deliberate expressive resource. It contributes both to efficiency of vocal production and to the recognizable color of his style. Within the vocal aesthetics of *Shanqu*, this transition is especially important because the genre often requires singers to move into exposed upper phrases without losing brightness, projection, or emotional directness. Shi Zhanming's handling of this register relationship shows how technical economy and folk vocal character can work together rather than conflict with one another.

5.6.1 True–False Voice Transition

True–false voice transition in Shi Zhanming's singing is handled smoothly, with no harsh break between fuller modal tone and lighter upper production. This allows him to reach high melodic points efficiently and to maintain continuity across changing pitch levels. Such smooth transition is technically valuable because it reduces strain while preserving a coherent tonal line. Rather than producing a sudden contrast between two unrelated voice qualities, he coordinates the shift so that the upper register grows naturally out of the established phrase. This gives the listener a sense of expansion rather than rupture, which is especially important in *Shanqu*, where melodic ascent often carries expressive and stylistic emphasis.

This transition appears to depend on gradual adjustment of breath support, resonance focus, and vocal weight. As the phrase rises, the sound becomes lighter without losing core energy, and resonance shifts in a way that preserves carrying power while releasing excessive pressure. Because the shift is prepared in advance, upper notes do not sound detached from the earlier line. Instead, the transition supports an unbroken phrase shape in which technical change remains largely inaudible as a mechanical event. In practical terms, this helps Shi Zhanming maintain both vocal efficiency and the natural folk character of the sound.

5.6.2 Expressive Function of Register Switching

The expressive function of register switching lies in its ability to intensify emotional contrast. A shift into lighter registration can suggest distance, yearning, or heightened tension, while a return to fuller tone can restore grounding and directness. In this way, register change contributes meaningfully to the expressive rhetoric of the performance. In Shi Zhanming's singing, this contrast is not exaggerated into theatrical opposition; instead, it is integrated into the broader phrasing of the song. Register change therefore acts as a subtle expressive contour within the line, shaping how emotion unfolds across the phrase rather than drawing attention to itself as a special effect.

This expressive use is particularly effective in phrases that rise toward a climactic point. The lighter upper production can create a sense of lifted emotional space, as if the sound momentarily leaves ordinary speech-grounded weight and enters a more suspended expressive register. When the tone returns to stronger modal support, the phrase regains firmness and immediacy. Such alternation enriches the emotional vocabulary of *Shanqu* without disrupting its folk simplicity. It shows that register switching in Shi Zhanming's singing is not merely functional, but a resource for shaping emotional perspective within the melody.

5.6.3 Vocal Identity in Shanqu Performance

At the level of vocal identity, this register technique helps define Shi Zhanming's recognizable *Shanqu* sound. The balance between penetrating modal tone and flexible upper production gives his singing both power and suppleness. As a result, register use becomes part of stylistic signature rather than merely a hidden technical mechanism. It contributes to the sense that his voice can expand upward while remaining regionally grounded, preserving the bold, bright, and emotionally direct character expected in the genre.

This is also why register transition has pedagogical significance. For singers learning *Shanqu*, the challenge is not simply to sing high notes, but to do so in a way that preserves regional tone color, intelligible diction, and expressive immediacy. Shi Zhanming's example demonstrates that successful upper-register singing in this repertoire

depends on coordinated adjustment rather than force. His practice offers a practical model of how vocal identity can be sustained through efficient technique, making register transition an important bridge between performance tradition and contemporary teaching.

Overall, falsetto and modal voice transition may be regarded as a core feature of Shi Zhanming's technique because it supports high-range efficiency, expressive contrast, and stylistic distinction. It demonstrates how technical economy and folk vocal aesthetics can operate together in *Shanqu* performance. More broadly, this aspect of his singing confirms that register coordination is not a secondary detail but an essential part of how the genre's high, bright, and penetrating vocal profile is maintained in contemporary performance. Through the smooth relationship between modal tone and lighter upper production, Shi Zhanming preserves both vocal continuity and regional style, showing that technical control can serve as a direct mechanism of cultural and stylistic transmission.

5.7 Summary of Shi Zhanming's Singing Techniques

In summary, Shi Zhanming's singing technique can be understood as an integrated system in which vocal tone, resonance, breath support, pitch control, diction, ornamentation, and register transition reinforce one another. His performance preserves the bright, high, and emotionally direct qualities of Shanqu while also demonstrating technical organization suitable for contemporary pedagogy and analysis. For this reason, his singing provides an important reference for understanding how regional folk style may be sustained through disciplined vocal practice.



Figure 5.6 Example of falsetto and modal voice transition in Shanqu singing

Figure 5.6 illustrates falsetto and modal voice transition in Shi Zhanming's *Shanqu* performance through the coordination of lighter upper production, modal support, and smooth register change. In relation to Section 5.6, the figure emphasizes that high-range continuity, expressive contrast, and regional vocal identity are preserved through the integrated use of register coordination.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND SUGGESTIONS

6.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the current status of Shanqu and to analyze the singing techniques of Shi Zhanming. Using qualitative methods, including document review, field observation, interview data, and performance analysis, the study addressed both the cultural condition of Shanqu in contemporary society and the technical means through which its vocal style is sustained in performance.

The findings related to the first objective show that the present status of Shanqu is characterized by both continuity and transformation. Transmission now depends less on everyday oral community practice and more on hybrid mechanisms such as schools, festivals, cultural institutions, heritage programs, and digital media. Performance contexts have also shifted from local functional settings toward staged, educational, and mediated forms. Even so, Shanqu continues to preserve recognizable musical and cultural identity through dialect, vocal style, melodic character, and regional expressive memory.

The findings related to the second objective show that Shi Zhanming's singing technique operates as an integrated system. His performance demonstrates coordinated vocal production and resonance, breath control, pitch accuracy and register coordination, diction and expressive delivery, emotional expression and vocal ornamentation, and falsetto and modal voice transition. These features do not function separately; together they preserve the bright, penetrating, and emotionally direct qualities associated with Shanqu.

Taken together, the two parts of the study indicate that the survival of Shanqu depends not only on policy support or documentation, but also on the continuation of

style in actual performance. Chapter IV shows that Shanqu now survives through adaptation, mediation, and selective preservation, while Chapter V shows that representative singers such as Shi Zhanming help sustain the tradition by carrying its vocal identity into contemporary performance. In this sense, singing technique is not only an artistic matter but also a practical mechanism of cultural transmission.

In conclusion, Shanqu remains a living folk-song tradition, but one that now continues through new institutional, educational, and media-based conditions rather than through unchanged traditional environments. Shi Zhanming's singing provides an important example of how disciplined vocal technique can preserve folk aesthetics while supporting contemporary transmission and study.

6.2 Discussion

The discussion below interprets the findings in relation to the two research objectives and the revised analytical frameworks presented in Chapters IV and V.

6.2.1 Discussion on the Current Status of Shanqu

The findings on the current status of *Shanqu* suggest that preservation in contemporary society should be understood as a process of transformation rather than simple continuity. This interpretation is consistent with earlier studies that describe Shanxi folk songs as traditions now sustained through conservation models, public-cultural frameworks, and changing channels of dissemination rather than through unchanged village life alone. Guo (2022), for example, emphasizes the role of institutional support, contests, large-scale performances, and university activity in the conservation and development of Shanxi folk songs, while Wang, Razali, and Musib (2024) show that contemporary familiarity with Shanxi mountain songs is often mediated through education, cultural events, and media exposure rather than everyday community participation. The present study supports these broader observations, but contributes a more focused explanation of how such transformation specifically affects *Shanqu* in terms of transmission, performance context, continuity, adaptation, and challenge.

At the same time, the study confirms that contemporary support systems do not remove all problems. The weakening of oral community transmission, the aging of practitioners, the decline of dialect use, and the reorientation of audiences toward staged or mediated performance continue to affect the depth of inheritance. This is also in line with earlier scholarship. Mei (2021) shows that the artistic identity of Shanxi folk songs is closely tied to emotional expression and local stylistic character, while Guo (2022) notes that conservation efforts do not automatically resolve the problem of sustainable inheritance. The present study extends these points by showing that the issue is not only whether songs remain visible, but whether dialect-rich, participatory, and context-based knowledge can still be transmitted under contemporary conditions.

Therefore, the present status of *Shanqu* is best understood as a dynamic balance among continuity, adaptation, and mediation. This conclusion is compatible with Zhou and Hou's (2024) discussion of Shanxi folk songs in relation to culture–tourism integration and with the dissemination-oriented findings of Wang, Razali, and Musib (2024), both of which suggest that survival in the present depends on negotiated adaptation rather than static preservation. However, the present study differs from those broader discussions by emphasizing that continuity must be judged not only by institutional visibility or communicative reach, but also by the preservation of dialect, expressive style, and the musical character that make *Shanqu* regionally recognizable in sound.

Overall, the discussion indicates that Shanqu should not be treated as a disappearing relic, but as a living tradition whose future depends on how effectively adaptation is connected with cultural depth and stylistic continuity.

6.2.2 Discussion on the Singing Techniques of Shanqu by Shi Zhanming

The analysis of Shi Zhanming's singing techniques shows that his performance should be understood as an integrated technical and stylistic system rather than as a collection of separate vocal skills. This interpretation is broadly consistent with recent vocal studies that treat folk singing as the coordination of vocal function and stylistic identity. Wang and Zhao (2024) discuss modern Chinese folk singing in terms of

acoustic effort and resonance behavior, while Bin (2025) emphasizes the integration of technique and artistic expression in vocal teaching. The present study supports those general perspectives, but contributes a more repertoire-specific explanation by showing how vocal production and resonance, breath control, pitch accuracy and register coordination, diction and expressive delivery, emotional expression and vocal ornamentation, and falsetto and modal voice transition operate together within the particular aesthetics of *Shanqu*.

An important discussion point is that disciplined technique does not necessarily weaken traditional character. In Shi Zhanming's case, technical control appears to support rather than replace folk identity. This point is comparable to findings from studies of neighboring Loess Plateau traditions. Li and Yap (2024a) show that northern Shaanxi folk-song singing depends on regionally specific vocal production, high-register control, and stylistically appropriate tone, while Li and Yap (2024b) argue that correct diction and emotional expression are inseparable in performance. The present study reaches a similar conclusion for *Shanqu*: Shi Zhanming's focused vocal production and resonance, stable breath control, dialect-based diction, and shaped expressive delivery demonstrate that technical refinement can preserve rather than erase regional style when stylistic authenticity remains central.

Another important issue concerns the role of technique in transmission. The study suggests that diction and expressive delivery, emotional expression and vocal ornamentation, and falsetto and modal voice transition are not only performance effects; they are also carriers of style. This observation is compatible with dissemination- and inheritance-oriented scholarship showing that the sustainability of folk-song traditions increasingly depends on mediated transmission, representative performers, and organized channels of circulation rather than on unchanged community conditions alone (Wang, Razali and Musib, 2024, Guo, 2022). However, the present study adds a more explicit technical dimension by showing that transmission is not maintained only through repertoire circulation or performer reputation. It also depends on whether concrete vocal practices that produce the recognizable sound of *Shanqu* are successfully passed on.

The falsetto and modal voice transition is especially significant because it supports the high tessitura of *Shanqu* while also creating expressive contrast. In this respect, the present findings are compatible with broader vocal-pedagogical research that emphasizes register coordination as part of efficient and stylistically appropriate singing rather than as an isolated mechanism (Chen, Kanwicha and Teerapuksiri, 2026). At the same time, the broader importance of Shi Zhanming's singing lies in the complete coordination of vocal production and resonance, breath control, pitch accuracy and register coordination, diction and expressive delivery, emotional expression and vocal ornamentation, and falsetto and modal voice transition. His performance therefore offers a practical model for how *Shanqu* may be taught, analyzed, and sustained in contemporary contexts without losing its folk-based character.

In conclusion, the discussion of Shi Zhanming's singing confirms that technical discipline can function as a means of preserving, clarifying, and transmitting regional folk-song identity rather than opposing it.

6.3 Suggestions

The suggestions of this study are presented in two areas: practical application and future research, in line with the two research objectives.

6.3.1 Suggestions for Practical Application

First, cultural institutions and local agencies should support transmission not only through public performance but also through community-based learning, documentation, and intergenerational activities that preserve dialect and local style.

Second, educational institutions should incorporate Shanqu into teaching in ways that combine technical training with cultural context, so that students learn not only repertoire but also pronunciation, expressive style, and performance background.

Third, Shi Zhanming's singing may be used as a reference model for pedagogical analysis, especially in relation to vocal tone, breath control, diction, ornamentation, and register transition within Shanqu style.

Fourth, performance-based and field-based learning should be encouraged so that transmission remains connected to lived musical practice rather than becoming purely textual or staged.

6.3.2 Suggestions for Future Research

First, future research may compare regional variants of Shanqu in order to clarify differences in style, transmission, and performance context across local traditions.

Second, further studies may conduct more detailed acoustic or physiological analysis of Shi Zhanming's singing in order to deepen technical understanding of Shanqu vocal production.

Third, future research may examine how Shanqu functions in music education, digital dissemination, and cross-cultural presentation in contemporary society.

Finally, interdisciplinary research that combines ethnomusicology, vocal pedagogy, performance analysis, and heritage studies may provide a stronger basis for understanding both the cultural future of Shanqu and the technical means by which it is sustained.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

APPENDIX ACOLLECT RESEARCH FIELD DATA



Figure A.1 Interview with Shi Zhanming.



Figure A.2 Shi Zhanming's Performance of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You.*



Figure A.3 Attended the 15th Chinese Golden Bell Award for Music competition.



Figure A.4 Attended a lecture delivered by Shi Zhanming on the topic of Shanqu.



Figure A.5 Attended a lecture delivered on the topic of Shanxi folk song.



Figure A.6 Conducted interviews to collect additional data.

APPENDIX B

MUSICAL SCORE

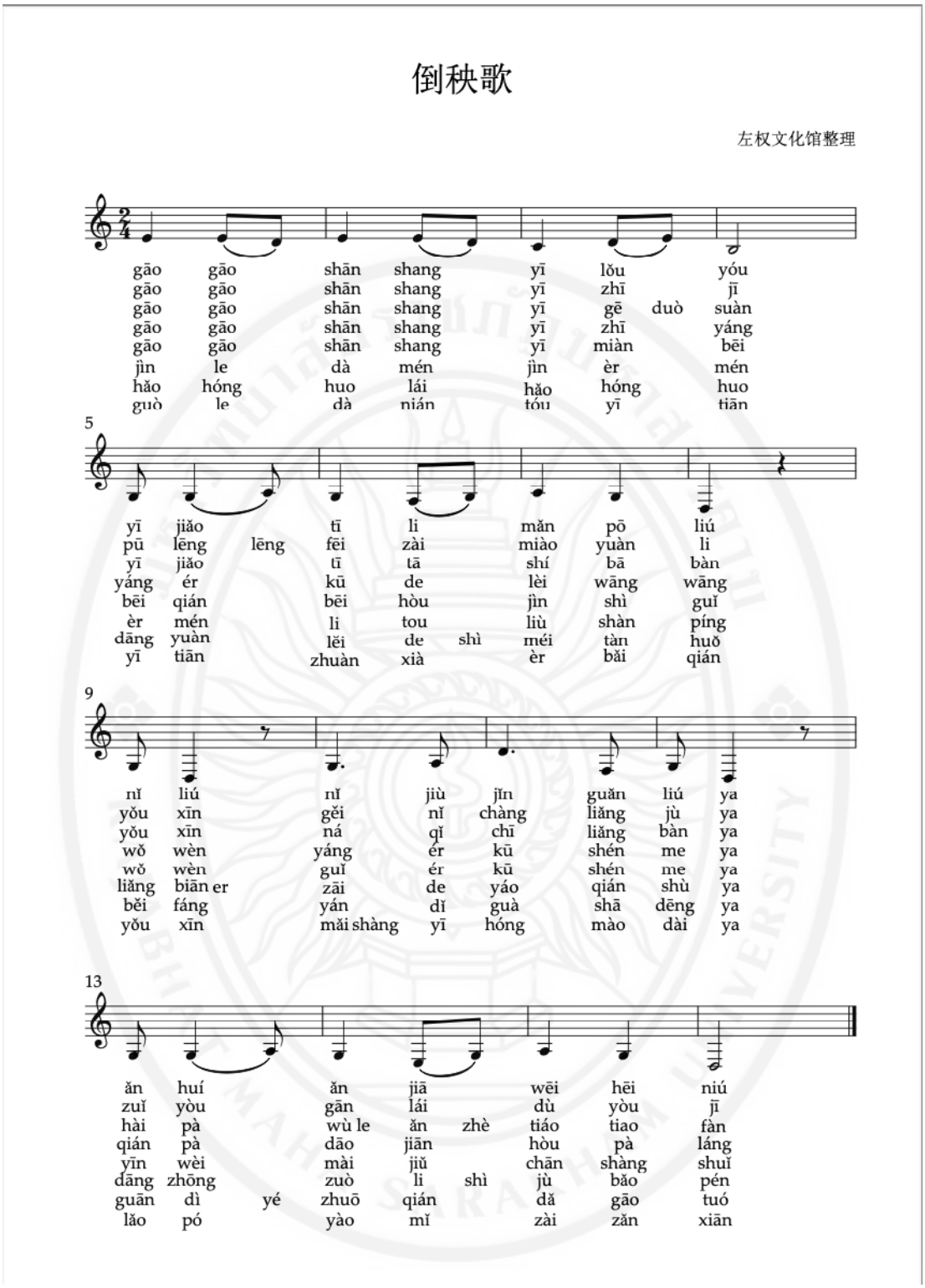


Figure B.1 Musical Score of *Gaoshan Shang Yi Lou You*

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