XIQU

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Audience profile

Cantonese opera is mainstream. No participants have paid for performances of other Xiqu genres.

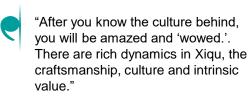
- Vast majority of respondents attend performance in **pairs/ groups**. Their partners are mostly friends and elder family members.
- Apart from entertainment, most participants are aware of the art form's cultural and historical value.



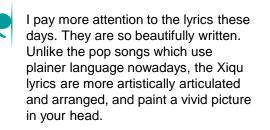
- Participants gain Xiqu knowledge mainly via show appreciation, very few (only 1 in 12 respondents have learnt Xiqu in early years). Despite so, all show admiration and respect to performers and production team (costume/ props/ stage setting).
- Beautiful lyrics are one of the attractions of Xigu, but some less experienced audience find it challenging to understand if they are sung, even for Cantonese opera. The use of classical Chinese integrated with traditional singing techniques makes it challenging to understand.
- **COVID-19** is the major cause holding lapsed participants[#] from comeback
 - Apart from avoiding the crowd, lapsed participants find it challenging to convince friends to participate due to low prevalence in society

"Xiqu is an art for all types of audience - those looking for fun or even aspiration (雅俗共賞)"

Active Xiqu participant



Active Xigu participant



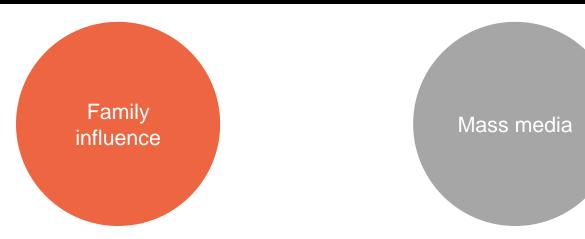
Lapsed Xigu participant



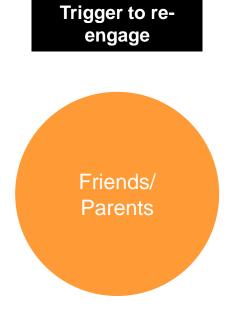
Active participants: those who have participated in >2 paid Xiqu performances in P1Y (N=6 identified); Lapsed participants: those who ceased participation since COVID-19 outbreak (N=6 identified)

Early influence could be traced back to respondents' exposure to Xiqu during childhood. First trial takes place upon invitation from friends/ family.

Seeds for future participation The influence could be traced back to respondents' childhood and that shaped the respondents into non-Xiqu rejector



- Habitual participation of elder members in the family
- Entry point to understand famous piece (e.g. The Flower Princess 帝 女花)
- Old Cantonese drama (粤語長片) on TV
- Cultural programme and performance on RTHK31



- After respondents grew into adulthood, they met friends with similar interests and formed strong bonding
- Would take initiative to accompany elder family members to shows



"Xiqu bring my friend and me together. We are now a cohesive interest group. We all do the same thing which is to support art.

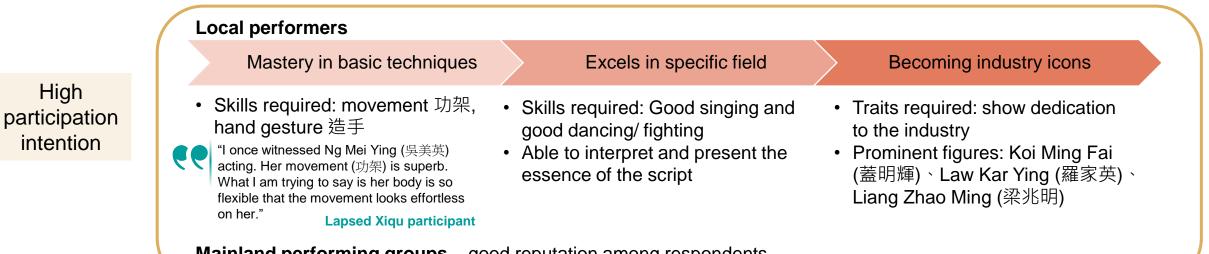


Consideration – core (1)

Performers recognised for good acting and industry contribution drive appeal. Their halo could also increase the acceptance of green performers.

Performers/ Performing groups

Renowned performers and performing groups could carry show quality. In contrast, green performers (新秀) need other cues for quality assurance



Mainland performing groups – good reputation among respondents.

Moderate participation intention

Green performers

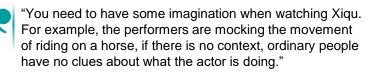
- One-third of respondents have attended rising star (新秀) performances.
 - Despite absence of big names, the showcase is a good performance as new performers will give their best shots
 - To overcome the absence of big names, listing the apprenticeship (師承) is important

Consideration – core (2)

Contexts of Xiqu plays are usually different from real-life settings. To overcome comprehension barrier, some basic understandings of well-known plays might help audience link up dots.

Play/ script

Xiqu requires more attention to comprehend and appreciate as the language used in conversation, song pitch and motions are unfamiliar to most



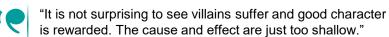
Lapsed Xiqu participant



Classical plays

- Classical and familiar plays are having a clear advantage as participants already have some understanding of the plot
 - "The Flower Princess (帝女花) has a strong and
 - solid script. The lyrics are well-thought and it has a historical background." Lapsed Xiqu participant
- These plays become their comfort zone and respondents are okay with watching the play repeatedly
- That said, audience may also look out for hints of enhancement
- In general, plots too exaggerated or too flat (implying an expected result) draw a negative association

Lapsed Xigu participant





"I recently watched an enhanced version of The Reincarnation of a Beauty (再世紅梅記). I was thrilled when one of the actress (Li Huiniang 李慧娘) popped up from the coffin. It is a recent enhancement and it makes you feel like watching a movie."

Lapsed Xiqu participant



Consideration – supplementary

Apart from plays and performers which depict the profound Chinese culture, some audience admires the craftsmanship of headdresses and costumes. Venue is a secondary consideration.

Craftmanship

- Costumes (clothing + accessories), make-up, props and stage setting that fascinate the audience
- These components are proof of profound culture and reminders of how artists pass the knowledge/ ritual from generation to generation
- To those who pay much attention to this hardware, they look for these elements on posters during the purchase decision journey

When I watch Xiqu, I mainly look at props and stage settings. On one hand, it is my hobby. But it is alarming that this culture would soon disappear after those master quit."

Active Xiqu participant

*My friends invited me to the show. Then I become amazed by the sophistication in make-up and accessories."

Active Xiqu participant

Venue

- MTR-accessible is important
 - WKCD and Ko Shan Theatre, despite their location in city centre, drive little appeal
- Crossing the harbour to Sunbeam Theatre poses concerns for audience living in Kowloon and New Territories, transit bus could make it up

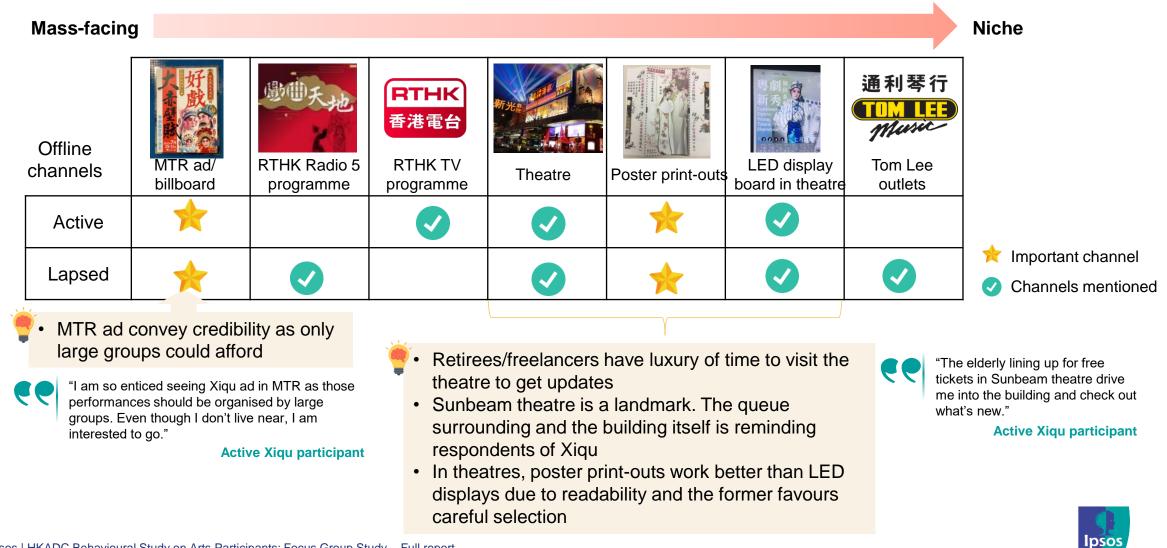


"I used to live near Sunbeam Theatre so I usually watch shows there. Sometimes, I could see elderly queueing up for free tickets."

Active Xiqu participant

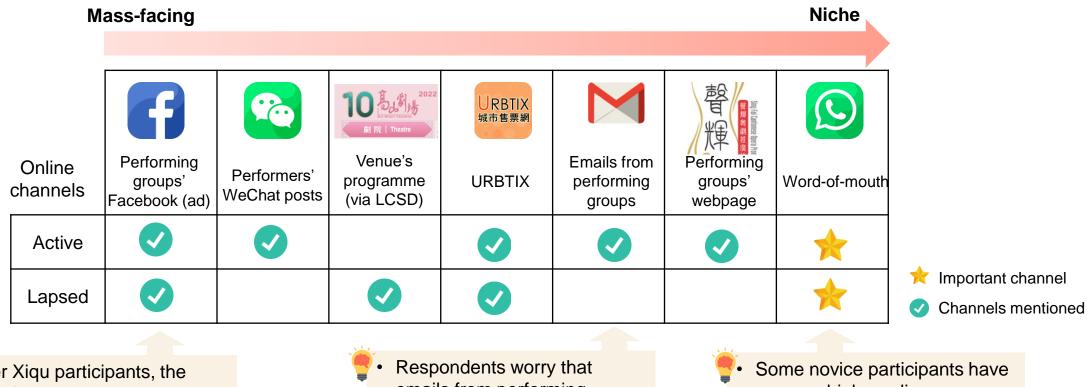


Moving offline, some audience are willing to spend extra effort to get printout posters. Advertisements in high-traffic locations promote credibility.



Online promotion channels

Companion is important in Xiqu participation – friends' recommendations and invitations strongly affect the decision.

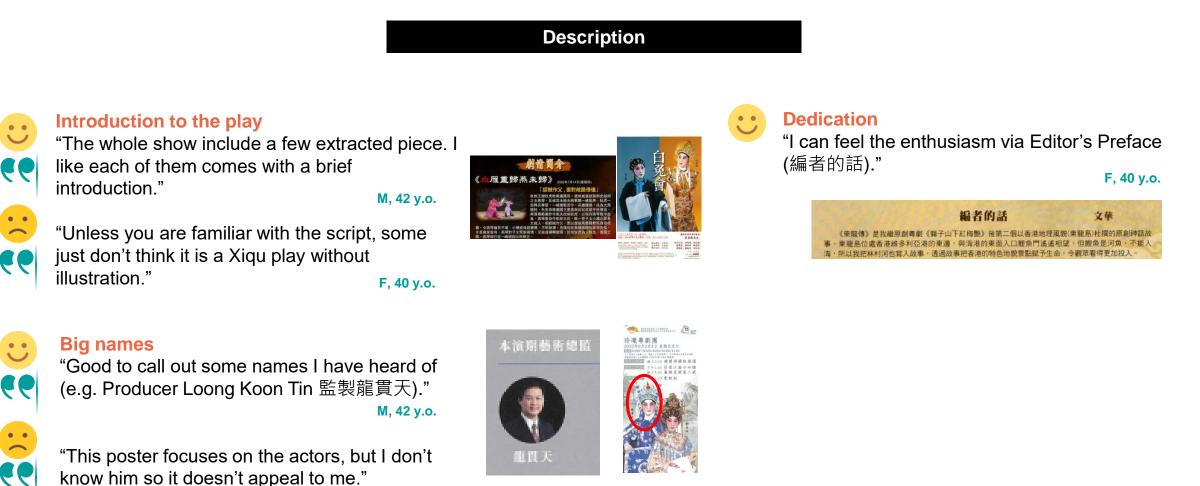


To elder Xiqu participants, the impact of Facebook drops as information is not consolidated and too busy Respondents worry that emails from performing groups will be sent to the junk email folder Some novice participants have an even higher reliance on friends' recommendations as it could filter some "bad" shows



Poster design

Posters shall expect to face audience of different levels of understanding of Xiqu. It is important to provide comprehensive information to convey value to those who are new to the art.





M, 42 y.o.

Poster design (2)

The visual image of a poster plays a critical role since it triggers people to pick up a leaflet and explore for more information.

Design



Colour

"The printing is nice. The poster uses CMYK printing and it's single page. Among all posters on the shelf, I will spot this one first."

М, 54 у.о.



;; ()

Prefer real people than cartoon "it looks more like a theatre show. read through it and don't feel like this is a Xiqu show." F, 57 y.o.



Selling points



Show traditional costumes, not modern clothing "The headdress and all other accessories are unique."





"I don't like Trump on Show (專 劇特朗普). Rather, I once went to a show and the performers wear beautiful costumes."



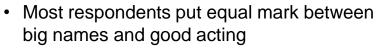
M, 48 y.o.

M, 48 y.o.



Building a good show

A good Xiqu show shall demonstrate good acting, sophisticated stage design details, right innovation and allow engagement.



- Renowned actors should have master acting skills (e.g. hand gesture 造手), developed expertise in specific field (singing/ fighting/ dancing), and win trust from dedication
- Avoid plots too flat/ exaggerated when remaking/ enhancing the classic pieces/ creating new scripts
- Provide audience with more context related to the show, including the below:
 - Novice audience: Introduction to the plot, displaying subtitles during the show and introduction to the performers
 - Experienced audience: Knowledge on historical background





Lapsed Xiqu participant

DSO

Post-show engagement

The audience enjoy interacting with performing groups/ performers, such as joining membership. However, they also expect the relation to bring some benefits (e.g. ticketing discount).

Recommend to friends



Subscribe E-newsletter (EDM)

- The majority are fine with email newsletter
- Also ask for consent during ticket transaction



Suggestion – Membership

- Some are eager to join member scheme if it provides a discount upon continuous purchase
- One mentioned providing him with a cross-group ticket package to encourage trying out other groups

Like/ Follow on social media

- Provide alternatives to QR code as few worry the code will direct to an unsecured site
- Consider creating a WeChat account as few mentioned they are using
- Some struggle with information overflow on social media, reminding them to turn on notifications to stay tuned
- Suggestion Post-show interaction
- Fans yearn for one-to-one interaction (e.g. phototaking, getting signature)

Implications

- Xiqu respondents are open to engaging with performing groups and keeping up with their latest development
- They would even want to take a step further and become members
- Also, they yearn for more interaction with the performers

→ Performing groups could create touchpoints that are relevant to audience' lives and promote interaction between them and the performers



Xiqu needs to appeal to mass public for sustained growth. Education is the first and a key step to recruiting participants.

Upfront challenge – Slow growth of audience base

- Many respondents find challenging to invite spouses/ kids/ friends who are non-Xiqu fans as they have limited knowledge and associate the art
 - with dated image. From the industry's perspective, this implies challenges to expanding its audience base
- \rightarrow Equip citizens with the knowledge to appreciate and address an image pain points to drive trial

Mass public promotion

Lower participation barrie

Early-stage promotion

School's policy

- 1. Integrate Xiqu-related knowledge
 - Draw interest with fun facts (e.g. mask designs)
- 2. Invite performing groups for mini-performance/ interaction sessions at schools

"Start with something easier to understand. If we ask a kid to spend 3-4 hours watching The Flower Princess (帝女花). He wouldn't know what is this for. Instead, if we start talking about masks, he may already learn about this in Visual Arts lessons."

Lapsed Xiqu participant

Art group's approach

- 1. Leverage young Xiqu talents (e.g. Leung Sum Yee 梁 心怡) to stay relevant to young people. Currently, new performers struggle to build fame in society
- 2. Encourage, or even create opportunities for crossgeneration participation

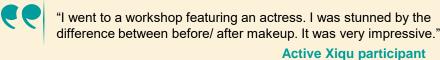
Mass public promotion Outside theatre

- 1. Step-up promotion via MTR/ bus stop billboard
- 2. Introduce Xiqu from different facets to provide a holistic view
 - "Promotion need not go straight to Xiqu. Instead, talk about its 'making-of' and how it evolves over time. People not interested in Xiqu would skip if they see a photo depicting Xiqu, we don't need a video either, a catalogue that talks about the culture will do."

Active Xiqu participant

Inside theatre

1. Public workshop/ Open day/ Discussion forum is wellreceived due to interaction and abundance of Xiqurelated information





"It is hard to invite friends. Xiqu is not like a movie where people can be easily amazed by the stunts and find fun in an hour or so. People already know the story plot before watching Xiqu but they don't have clues about styling and acting."

Active Xiqu participant

Going straight into Xiqu-related information drive limited appeal, public is looking for a more vivid image and in-depth understanding



Following promotion, reducing participation cost (time + monetary) and facilitating understanding could arouse trial interest.

Mass public promotion

Lower participation barriers

Suitable for beginners

1. Meet the first good show essentials





Classical plays (e.g. Prime Minister of Six States六國大封相、Zhong Kui 鐘馗) that beginners may already gain preliminary understanding elsewhere

Reputable performers (e.g. Koi Ming Fai 蓋鳴暉, Ng Mei Ying 吳美英, Sabrina Lee 龍劍笙, Lan Tien-you 藍天 佑) to present (sing + act) the story well



"For beginners, they must understand the script to find fun in the plot. Also, the singing needs to be good. Just like food, only delicacy could drive repetition."

Active Xiqu participant

2. Pre-show introduction to story plot

3. Subtitles in the performance. Some concerns around distraction undermining show experience



"One can understand the lyrics in written, but when it is sung or spoken in the way performers do, it becomes difficult to understand because it sounds too different to how we speak daily."

Active Xiqu participant

Lowering participating cost

- 1. On the basis of good show essentials, giving out free tickets could help trigger trials
- 2. Securing weekend slots at popular venues



"The weekend slots (of opular venues) always go to the large-scale groups, none for the smaller groups. Then, they could never attract more people to go as most people are free on weekends only." Active Xiqu participant

3. Cross-art-form bundle tickets to attract arts participants of other art forms



"If you really like watching Xiqu, you can accept a ticket price around \$200-300. Sometimes, larger groups sell ticket at \$500 performing at Sunbeam Theatre... Bundle ticket could lower the average price." Lapsed Xiqu participant

4. Offer shows of shorter duration (less than 2 hours)



"Short performance can arouse more interest because people won't bother to go if it is more than 2 hours."

Lapsed Xiqu participant

Actions needed to promote participation (3)

For active participants, bundle tickets could help them gain more exposure to different venues, troupes and performers. Interactive sessions work well to facilitate understanding of Xiqu.

Engagement

- Design gimmick events around "interaction" and "deepened Xiqu understanding"
- Interaction could be in the format of workshop and suitable across age
- "It would be good if you could feature some famous performers, such as Law Kar Ying (羅家英), so that I can meet him in person and listen to his voice. He could also perform some skills such as 水髮."

Active Xiqu participant

 Active participants also need guidance as they wish to understand Xiqu and the play more. A review session/ symposium (賞析會) comes as a good opportunity.

"To those who know a bit about Xiqu, they will be even more interested when provided with guidance to appreciate the acting, historical context of the play, or even highlights/ climax of the play."

Lapsed Xiqu participant

Ticketing

- Bundle ticket set across performing groups
 - To encourage audience to try new performing groups
- "For example, Yau Ma Tei Theater could feature different new performers. On one hand, audience could be aware of their shows; meanwhile, new performers have opportunities to shine."

Lapsed Xiqu participant

- Bundle ticket set across venues, particularly Yau Ma Tei Theatre & Ko Shan Theatre
 - The venues often feature new star competitions/showcases. The tactic provides motivation for audience to give it a try.
- "Is it possible for theatres to launch season tickets? If they can, audience could pick whatever interest them within a season and become more open to choose different groups and programmes."

Lapsed Xiqu participant

• Keep "early bird" offer

Venue

- "Open day" for Xiqu Centre could convince the respondents about the said-to-be advanced stage equipment and grand image
- Continue shuttle bus service and enhance logistics



Xiqu audience welcomes innovation and integrating modern features to the show. Particularly, they look forward to how arts-tech applications could enrich stage performance.

Use of technology

- Unlike other performing art forms, Xiqu audience shows the highest acceptance of art tech and is happy to try "something new"
- Most respondents expect the use of technology can improve stage effect (e.g. lighting/ projection)
- There are also mentions of recently built Xiqu Centre where equipment is all-rounded and advanced. Some respondents think these features make it a good place for shows with technology components.
- One participant mentioned that 3D projection could be one of the ways to introduce Xiqu to young audience.

Verbatim: How respondents perceive art tech

LED lighting/ 3D projection

"I watched an opera show overseas. The crew used LED lighting to project natural scenery, such as grassland and sky. Then, there are some actual props, backdrops and lightings, or that as exaggerated as 3D projection. There are people out there doing this, though I know it is expensive."

Active Xiqu participant

High-tech elements



"If you introduce this to the 30s, they can see how technology is applied in Xiqu. Instead, keeping talking about costumes and lighting, they can't feel the improvement. Would this work appeal to the young more?" Active Xiqu participant

Active Xiqu participant

A real-life example of art tech application



- Nan-yin (南音) is perceived as plain storytelling and thus unpalatable to some
- Background projection can provide more context, apart from embellished and rich stage effect



"Without projection and image, the performers feel like reading out text."

Active Xiqu participant

Cross-over with celebrity

- Most respondents welcome crossing over with reputable pop stars (e.g. Hins Cheung 張敬軒) as it promotes modernity and trendiness
- One respondent spoke of Gregory Charles Rivers (河國榮) and found collaboration with foreigners funny





New trends: Script + Online viewership

Not all novelty drives appeal. Audience is cautious when deciding to watch new original Xiqu play. Same with online performances through live streaming.

New original Xiqu script

- Respondents agree new script could synergise the industry, otherwise it would be a rotation of limited traditional plays
- One respondent took The Reincarnation of a Beauty (再世紅梅記) as an example to illustrate the now-classics was once new script
- What matters is the quality. It requires multi-fold effort to convince audience –
 - Promoted with reputable performers
 - Well-researched historical background
 - Professional stage setting
 - Keep traditional Xiqu costumes



"I watched original Xiqu before, but it wasn't a good experience. It's too hard so that I can't get it."

Active Xiqu participant

Online participation

- YouTube streaming/rebroadcasting the entire show does not drive appeal among active participants, nor mass public
- Sense of presence is missing due to poorer sound and resolution
- However, some respondents appreciate videos educating them about Xiqu, such as historical background/ plots of a play



"Recently I have come across some videos on Youtube. Some Youtubers talk about how Prime Minister of Six States (六國大封相) was written. It is a historical event and therefore, how the name came. I find it interesting."

Active Xiqu participant



"I once witnessed Ng Mei Ying (吳美英) acting. Her skills are superb. What I am trying to say is her body is so flexible that the movement looks effortless on her. It is something you could not see in such detail through DVD and 4K/8K."

Lapsed Xiqu participant



Small-medium groups shall try to promote Xiqu to a wider public and gain recognition from active participants by encouraging trials and ensuring good quality.

To mass public

Raise interest among youngsters

- Encourage cross-generation participation
- Attend school art education programmes if invited

Roll out workshop

- Enlighten citizens with Xiqu as a culture
- Promote the group itself and the performers highlight the stakeholders' effort so as to avoid citizens to take this cultural heritage for granted
- For theme, start with something light-hearted and fun, such as before/ after makeup

To active participants

Ticketing strategies

- Ticket set of a specific venue, cross-art form bundle ticket could help participants to explore new performing groups
- Provide free tickets to help first-time audience to overcome hesitation to new art groups
 - Fish where the fish are distribute tickets in places where regular audience visit frequently, including –
 - Community Centre/ Home Affairs Department office
 - Sha Tin Town Hall/ City Town Hall
 - Also, mind the timing of free shows. Target weekends

Nurture green performers

- Help them to sharpen The Four Skills and Five Techniques (四 功五法)
- Endorsing the new actors with renowned ones. A respondent mentioned stating "apprenticeship (師承)" may arouse interest
- Grouping the new actors together (could be in the format of a contest) and use this to attract those who are willing to support the new generation



Section appendix Respondent profile (Active participants)

			Dem	ographics	Arts participation overview				
	Gender	Age	Marital status; have kids	Occupation	Education level	Monthly household income	No. of arts event participation in past 1 year	Xiqu genres participated and frequency	Participation in non-local production pre COVID-19
R1	М	48	Single/N	Interior Design	S6/ F7 graduate	\$30,000- \$39,999	3	Cantonese Opera 3 times	Ν
R2	F	49	Married/N	Education	Associate or equivalent	\$50,000- \$59,999	5	Cantonese Opera 3 times; Non-Xiqu performance: 2 times	Y/50%
R3	F	45	Single/N	Loss adjustor	Bachelor	\$50,000- \$59,999	4	Cantonese Opera 1 time; Song performance: 1 time; Unknown genre 1 time Non-Xiqu performance 1 time	Ν
R4	F	51	Single/N	Ecommerce	S6/ F7 graduate	\$30,000- \$39,999	2	Cantonese Opera 2 times	Ν
R5	F	57	Married/ 1 kid (22 y.o.)	Non- profitable sector	S5 graduate	\$20,000- \$29,999	4	Cantonese Opera 4 times	Y/50%
R6	М	52	Married/ 2 kids (15, 17 y.o.)	Insurance	Bachelor	\$60,000- \$69,999	2	Cantonese Opera 2 times	Ν

Definitions:

"Past 1 year" refers to period from Jul 2021 to Jun 2022 "Pre-COVID-19" refers to period before Jan 2020



Section appendix Respondent profile (Lapsed participants)

	Demographics						Arts participation overview				
	Gender	Age	Marital status; have kids	Occupation	Education level	Monthly household income	Participation in paid performing art in past 1 year	Pre-COVID-19: Participation frequency	Pre-COVID-19: Xiqu genres participated and frequency	Pre-COVID-19: Participation in non-local production	Participation intention in future 1 year
R1	F	42	Married/N	Property management	Bachelor	\$60,000- \$69,999	Ν	2	Cantonese opera 2 times	Ν	Very high
R2	F	51	Single/N	Engineering	S5 graduate	\$20,000- \$29,999	Ν	2	Cantonese opera 2 times	Ν	Quite high
R3	М	54	Single/N	Printing	Associate or equivalent	\$30,000- \$39,999	Ν	1	Cantonese opera 1 time	Ν	Quite high
R4	F	59	Divorced/ 1 kid (30 y.o.)	Food Retail	S5 graduate	\$30,000- \$39,999	Ν	2	Cantonese opera 2 times	Ν	Very high
R5	F	40	Married/ 2 kids (9, 12 y.o.)	Health product retail	Associate or equivalent	\$50,000- \$59,999	Ν	2	Cantonese opera 2 times	Ν	Quite high
R6	Μ	42	Single/N	Information technology	Associate or equivalent	\$60,000- \$69,999	Ν	2	Cantonese opera 2 times	Ν	Quite low

Definitions:

"Past 1 year" refers to period from Jul 2021 to Jun 2022 "Pre-COVID-19" refers to period before Jan 2020

"Future 1 year" refers to period from Aug 2022 to Jul 2023

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Section appendix

Xiqu

Photo credits

Cityline.com 1 image on slide 85, retrieved from https://www.cityline.com/cinema/sunbeam.do



Hong Kong Arts Development Council (Jockey Club Community Channel)

1 image on slide 94, retrieved from https://jccc.hk/en-

us/%E9%9F%B3%E6%A8%82%E6%95%85%E4%BA%8B%E9%8C%84%E5%83%8F%E3%80%8A%E9%AD%82%E9%81%8A%E8%A8%98%E3%80%8B



Ko Shan Theatre (Leisure and Cultural Service)

1 image on slide 86, retrieved from https://www.lcsd.gov.hk/tc/kst/index.html



Zuni Icosahedron (Popticket) 1 image on slide 94, retrieved from

https://www.popticket.hk/en/event/blind-musician-dou-wun

Radio Television Hong Kong

2 images on slide 85, retrieved from https://www.rthk.hk/radio/radio5/programme/tco

Sing Fai Opera 1 image on slide 86, retrieved from http://www.singfaiopera.org.hk/





The Illuminai Theatre of Chinese Opera (Sing Tao headline)

1 image on slide 87, retrieved from

https://hd.stheadline.com/news/columns/116/20220827/997209/%E5%B0%88%E6%AC%84-%E5%BE%90%E8%93%89%E8%93%89-%E9%81%B8%E6%BC%94-%E7%99%BD%E5%85%94%E6%9C%83-%E8%A7%92%E8%89%B2%E5%BD%A2%E8%B1%A1%E4%BD%B3-

%E6%9F%B3%E5%BE%A1%E9%A2%A8%E5%A4%A5%E6%8B%8D%E6%9E%97%E8%8A%AF%E8%8F%B1%E6%9C%89%E6%96%B0%E9%AE%AE%E6%8 4%9F-%E5%96%81%E5%96%81%E8%AA%9E





Section appendix

Photo credits 新光中國戲曲文化 (*Sunbeam Spot*) 1 image on slide 88, retrieved from <u>https://www.sunbeamspot.com/movie/770</u>

新光中國戲曲文化 *(Timetable)* 1 image on slide 94, retrieved from <u>https://timable.com/zh-hk/event/1882839</u>

Tom Lee

1 image on slide 85, retrieved from https://www.tomleemusic.com.hk/en/

Urbtix

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