

University of Hradec Králové
Faculty of Education
Department of Music

Reflections on Chinese Pop Music Singing Higher Education
Diploma Thesis

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The diploma thesis is composed of two parts. The first part consists of the concert solo performance (recital) which requires a high level of technical skills from the student. The concert performance is based on the appropriately selected dramaturgy presenting interpretive qualities of the diploma student and her ability to adequately adapt to the musical style during the interpretation of individual songs.

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3. Alternative Voices : Essays on Contemporary Vocal and Choral Composition
Authors: Anhalt, István Publication Information: Toronto : University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division. 1984
4. Singing for Themselves : Essays on Women in Popular Music Authors: Rudden, Patricia Spence Publication Information: Newcastle : Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2007
5. Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow : Chinese Pop Music and Its Cultural Connotations Authors: Marc L. Moskowitz Publication Information: Honolulu : University of Hawaii Press. 2010
6. The Contemporary Vocalist Improvement Course by Jeannie Deva (Author), Joe Scoglio (Editor) ISBN-10: 1882224094 ISBN-13: 978-1882224098
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Declaration

I hereby declare that this Diploma thesis was produced independently under the supervision of the supervisor of the Diploma thesis and that all the used sources and bibliography were properly referenced.

In Hradec Králové, 11. 4. 2019

Annotation

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This thesis focuses on the development of pop music singing higher education in China. The aim of this work is to explore the past, present and future of the discipline, and to identify its existing problematic issues whilst attempting to find appropriate solutions.

Using the Shenyang Conservatory of Music as a basis for this study, the author applies methodological analytic and comparative research to the structure and organisation of the subject and its teaching, both past and present, in Chinese and western institutions.

The accumulated data provides evidence of deficiencies within the system of Chinese pop music education system, thereby providing the author with a platform from which to propose methods to aid the future development of the discipline.

Keywords: China, pop music, development, vocal techniques, curriculum, teaching method, pop music higher education

Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis (Diploma) meets the requirement set in the Rector's Decree No 13/2017 (Rules for Handling Bachelor, Diploma, Rigorosum, Dissertation and Habilitation Theses at UHK).

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Signature:

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Introduction

In 1978, the Communist Party of China implemented a policy of economic reform known as the open-door policy. For the first time, China was open to foreign investment, and the economic upsurge which followed brought with it massive societal change. The country went through a stage of rapid modernization and globalization, and in turn, western culture began to permeate Chinese society, particularly influencing younger generations. Western film and music made a big impact on the local youth culture, especially with regards to pop music. This was a new, exotic music which until that time had been inaccessible, and it captured the imagination of many. The heavy interest in this genre of music was noticed by the country's music education institutes, and by 1993, specialized courses in pop music were being offered as a subject of higher education.

Now, more than 25 years later, the sector of pop music higher education in China has surpassed all early expectations. Throughout the country, students are receiving education in pop music. But of course, in comparison with the western world, Chinese pop music is still in its early stages of existence. This could, from a certain standpoint, be deemed to be advantageous, when taken into consideration that it now has a proven model to follow in the form of western pop music, but on the other hand Chinese pop music should not look to simply imitate other already established forms, but instead learn from them and create its own sense of individuality.

Pop music has undoubtedly been developing at a fast rate, but such rapid development over a relatively small amount of time has led to issues within the pop music education system. One of the more glaring issues is the shortfall of concrete knowledge of the subject itself, and the deviations and misconceptions this creates in the area of its teaching. Due to its young existence, there is presently a lack of resources available to teachers of pop music, which consequently hinders the direction of instruction in regards to teaching methods, of both a practical and theoretical nature, whilst also impeding the implementation of a clear and concise framework for the relevant institutes to utilize.

After firstly giving an overview of the Chinese pop music industry and its history, this work will conduct an in-depth investigation into the origin and development of the pop music higher education system in China focusing on the specific area of pop music singing, before using the example of the Shenyang Conservatory of Music to comprehensively analyze the syllabus, teaching methods and examination systems currently in use.

By way of comparison, this work will use the Berklee College of Music as an example of an institute providing pop music singing education within a country possessing a more developed education system than that of China, noting its advantages, and what Chinese institutes could learn from its example. The final part of this work summarizes the shortcomings and inherent problems occurring within the field of Chinese pop music singing higher education, and puts forward some valuable suggestions for the future direction of its development.

1 The definition of pop music

The term *pop music* is known throughout the world, but what exactly is pop music? How can it be defined? Pop music in its modern form originated in the Anglo-Saxon world during the early 1950's. The name derives from the term *popular music*, and although the two names are often interchanged, popular music could describe any form of music which is popular, and it does not differentiate between a diverse range of styles. Pop music can also be eclectic inasmuch that it borrows from various styles of music, though there are core elements which define the genre. These typically include short-length songs following a chorus-verse structure, with repeated choruses and melodic tunes.

Although the general form would seem to be generic and basic, in actuality pop music is perpetually evolving. Considering that pop music is designed to appeal to a mass audience, as peoples' tastes change, so pop music changes with them in what can be described as a two-way process. It amalgamates the common pop elements with aspects of new music and whichever style of music is currently in vogue at that particular time. Therefore, in comparison to a typical pop song of the 1950's or 1960's, a more recent example may sound very far removed.

As music can be considered to hold value as a reflection of society, it is important to question ways in which pop music affects society. Being a mainstream, commercial genre of music, pop music is more accessible than any other style, and for that reason it has made an impact around the world. To use Michael Jackson as an example, his *Thriller* album is estimated to have sold over 66 million copies worldwide¹, making it the best-selling album in music history. During the 1980's and 1990's, Michael Jackson was one of the most recognizable people on the planet, idolized by countless people not only for his music, but also his fashion, image and style of dancing which are still widely imitated today.

The revenue earned from such astonishing album sales, not only Jackson's, but the huge number of artists throughout the history of pop music, have made, and continue to make,

¹ WHITE, Matt. *1984: Best-Selling Album of All Time-Guinness World Records*. [online] London: British Library, 2015. [cited 2019-01-18]. ISBN 978-1-908843-62-3. Available from Internet: <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/60at60/2015/8/1984-best-selling-album-of-all-time-392913>

a big impact on the world economy. In 2017 the global recorded music revenue amounted to \$9.4bn for digital streaming alone. It can be assumed that the largest portion of this revenue was accounted to pop music downloads. Factoring in live performance revenues as well as physical record sales, we can see that the amount of money the industry generates is hugely important to the world economy.

Being a part of this massive industry, successful pop stars are heavily publicized and marketed across the planet. Global brands desire the rights to use pop musicians' images for advertising purposes, such is the effect they have on society. Across the world, younger generations admire the glamorous lifestyles and wealth of these pop stars and carry aspirations to follow in their footsteps. Below is a table which shows the results of a survey conducted by W. C. Ho and W. W. Law for their publication *The cultural politics of introducing popular music into China's music education*². These findings illustrate the influence pop musicians (combined with film/TV actors) hold over young generations of Chinese citizens.

² HO, Wai-Chung and LAW, Wing-Wah. The cultural politics of introducing popular music into China's music education. *Journal of Popular Music and Society* [online]. The University of Hong Kong, 2012, no.3 [cited 2019-03-26]. pp. 399–425. ISSN 0300-7766. Available from Internet: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2011.567916>

	Junior middle (first year)	Junior middle (second year)	Senior middle (first year)	Senior middle (second year)	College / University (first year)	College / University (second year)
Pop song stars, film/TV stars	49.2	44.9	31.3	38	18.7	26.5
Sports stars	7.5	7.5	17.3	14.5	6.2	7.6
Political and military personalities	10.5	8.3	14.2	14.9	31.2	33.2
Scientists (technical experts)	8.9	8.7	5.9	6.5	7	5.7
Literature and arts persons/thinkers	8.9	7	7.3	5.5	6.3	4.9
Heroic role models	3.8	3.8	1.2	0.7	3.9	0.9
Entrepreneurs	0	1	0.2	1.4	0.3	1.5
Parents and family members	7	7.5	8.3	5.9	12	7.5
Teachers/Friends	1.8	6	1.9	3.4	3.1	3.3
Fictional personages	1.6	1.8	4	4.8	5.4	2.8
Self	0.6	0.8	2.6	0.7	0.8	0.4
Others	0.2	2.7	5.5	3.9	1.5	5.6

Figure 1: Categories of idols chosen by students in different years of education (%)³

As is shown in the above table, nearly 50 % of first-year middle school students chose pop/film stars as their idols, compared to the second highest percentage of 10.5 % who chose political/military personalities, and 7.5 % who picked sports stars to be their idols, this shows the social effect of pop music in society. Although the percentage of students who chose pop stars decreased to 18.7 % of first-year college/university students, the figure rose again to 26.5 % for second-year students. These statistics give clear evidence of the influential effect pop musicians have on Chinese youth culture. In a country where successful artists, writers and politicians have been revered throughout history, the fact that so many younger Chinese select pop stars as their idols makes a strong statement of pop music's power in society. It also gives a clear example of why there are ever-increasing numbers of students enrolling in

³ HO, Wai-Chung and LAW, Wing-Wah. The cultural politics of introducing popular music into China's music education. *Journal of Popular Music and Society* [online]. The University of Hong Kong, 2012, no.3 [cited 2019-03-26]. pp. 399–425. ISSN 0300-7766. Available from Internet: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2011.567916>

pop music higher education courses in China. This trend is something that will be explored in detail further into this work.

The idolization of pop stars transforms a simple musician into a role-model who carries influence in society, hence the problematic issue of pop music within certain politically and socially repressed nations of the world whose rulers may see pop music and the influence it holds over society to be a threat to their cultures or social identities and therefore suppress and outlaw the consumption of this music. This issue was discussed in relation to music prohibition within Afghanistan in the book *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* by the author Tia DeNora⁴.

Although the power of pop music and its musicians is often exploited for financial and commercial gains, we have witnessed numerous occasions when its power has been harnessed for more sincere causes: an obvious example being charitable events. The most eminent of these events is the 1985 Live Aid benefit concert which was watched as a live broadcast by an estimated audience of 1.9 billion people across 150 countries, nearly 40 % of the world population at the time, and raised close to £150 million⁵. These proceeds were used to provide much needed aid to famine-stricken Ethiopia. It was hugely successful, has been replicated many times for varying charitable causes and is a prime example of how pop music can directly affect lives.

⁴ DENORA, Tia. *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003. ISBN 0-521-53724-X.

⁵ BETTS, Graham. *Infographic Guide to Music*. London: Cassell Illustrated, 2014. ISBN 978-1-844037-53-7.

2 The origin and development of pop music in China

Pop music has played a role in the history and development of China for nearly a hundred years, especially since China's open-door policy⁶ was implemented in the 1970's through which the country opened up both politically and economically to the rest of the world. This policy aided an economic boom, as well as the rapid development of science and technology, culture and art. After the people's living standards greatly improved, Chinese citizens became more spiritually satisfied, and this had a knock-on effect within the genre of pop music.

With a simple melody, catchy lyrics and a vivid expression of true feelings and emotions, pop music has evolved into the music of the masses, thus becoming the mainstream music for human consumption. In comparison with North America and many European countries, the development of pop music in China has been relatively slow, which is in no small part due to the much later beginnings of the genre. In order to clearly set out the distinct stages of advancement in the domain of Chinese pop music, from its infancy up until the present, these stages are hereby listed chronologically. Each era stated can be distinguished from the preceding and succeeding eras by its unique styles, influences and progression.

2.1 1920 to 1940

This is the era during which the famous Shanghai dance halls⁷ were at their most prevalent. Jazz and swing performers from Britain and America travelled to perform there, and the halls would be filled with local residents and servicemen from abroad who were stationed in Shanghai at the time. This rising popularity of western music influenced numerous native Chinese composers to shift their style of composition away from the tradition of Chinese folk

⁶ The open-door policy was implemented in 1978 by the Communist Party of China. It brought about economic reform, opening China up to foreign investment, which consequently had a great effect on society. China went through a stage of globalization, and the influence of western culture became more apparent.

⁷ From the early 20th century, Shanghai was an important centre of industry and trade. By the 1930s there were more than 60,000 foreign citizens residing in the city. The substantial number of European and American residents living in Shanghai brought with them many facets of western culture, including popular music- which at that time was predominantly forms of jazz music. This facilitated the opening of dance halls, which soon gained popularity with both the foreign and native communities, and this popularity consequently had an influential effect on Chinese musicians and music.

and opera, towards this more modern genre of dance hall music. One such composer, Li Jinhui⁸, who is known as the *Father of Chinese pop music*, is widely regarded to be the founder of modern music in China. His work *The Drizzle*, written in the 1920s, is considered the earliest example of Chinese pop music.

The famed American jazz trumpeter Buck Clayton spent time working in Shanghai together with Li Jinhui. They both learned from and influenced each other, each in turn adding the other's familiar musical elements into their own music. During this period, Li Jinhui's works contained folk music elements and the rhythm of Western jazz.

Away from the music halls, the decades of the 1920's, 30's and 40's gave rise to the development of cinema in China. This could be seen as a vehicle for the spreading of popular music across the country. This new music was no longer confined to the inside of Shanghai dance halls, and now everyone had access to it. The evolution of Chinese cinema saw the emergence of a collective of singers whose music was often used in film. These singers went on to dominate the Chinese pop music industry during this period. One singer in particular-Zhou Xuan, is seen as being the most iconic and representative of Chinese pop stars of the era.

2.2 1941 to 1970

During this period Chinese pop music was heavily affected by developments and innovation taking place in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Taiwan's music scene was at this time deeply influenced by Japanese pop music, while the style of Hong Kong pop music still retained many aspects carried over from the old Shanghai dance hall period of previous decades.

2.3 1971 to 1980

The 1970's saw the introduction of the open-door policy. It entailed a huge reform in areas of technological development, politics, the economy and culture, which had an effect of

⁸ Li Jinhui (1891–1967). Chinese composer and songwriter. Credited with creating a new musical form known as Shidaiqu – a fusion of American jazz and Chinese folk music.

vastly speeding up the development of the country. This opening-up offered the general population access to western culture and arts for which they had, up until then, been denied. People's curiosity and eagerness to absorb this new culture began to grow. People could now buy cassette tapes of pop songs from Europe, America, Taiwan and Hong Kong. There was now a wider range of TV shows offered, and an influx of foreign workers and teachers into China, each enabling more contact with the western world to the common population. However, during this period pop music also faced negative criticism from some parts of society.

The development and spread of pop music faced many obstacles. For example, it was frowned upon by many of the older generations who considered it culturally unhealthy, killing off the music of Chinese cultural heritage and contaminating the minds of younger generations, while pop singing was criticized as a low-level form, void of technical method. Therefore, many young people of the time would go to extreme lengths in order to disguise their consumption of western pop music. There is a humorous anecdote popular among children of this era that they would listen to cassette tapes of the hugely popular singer Teresa Teng whilst huddled under a duvet to muffle the sound in order to hide the music from their disapproving older family members' ears.

2.4 1981 to 1990

Colloquially known as *the spring of Chinese pop music*, with the deepening of China's economic and cultural opening up greatly modernizing the country, mainland China saw the establishment of numerous record companies⁹. These companies could see the rising popularity of modern music within the country, thus giving them the desire to cultivate more singers, writers, producers and arrangers of pop music. That this new-found dedication ushered in such great developments within the pop music industry is the reason why the era became known as the spring of Chinese pop music, signaling the evolution of the genre. In order to reinforce the popularity of modern music within the Chinese mainland, more and more record companies began introducing a number of high-quality Taiwanese and Hong

⁹ Huayi Brothers Media Corp., Ocean Butterflies International, Pacific Audio & Video Co.

Kong pop musicians such as Teresa Teng, Luo Dayou and the Hong Kong rock band Beyond, whose music has remained popular until today.

By the 1980's pop culture could be encountered throughout China. Karaoke bars became a feature of every town and city, pop stars advertised the latest products on billboards and TV, and in 1984 the CCTV Spring Festival Gala¹⁰, long being a showcase of traditional Chinese culture and arts, and the singularly most-watched TV programme in the world, invited the renowned Hong Kong pop singers Xi Xiulan and Zhang Minmin to perform. This was the first time a pop act had been involved in such an institution, indicating that the social identity of pop music had finally been truly accepted as a music form.

2.5 1991 to 2010

During this era there was a trend of diversification within pop music in China. There was a wider variety of musical genres in the public awareness, which in turn began to have an influential effect on pop music styles. Mainland film and television were utilizing music from further afield than had been the case previously, and although there was still a big appetite for the long-popular ballads from Taiwan, and Hong Kong's *four kings*¹¹ collective of film and pop stars were at the peak of their popularity, at the same time European, American, Japanese and South Korean pop culture was continuing to affect the audio-visual industry and the local aesthetic of pop music. At this time many record and management companies took to organizing artist training placements in Korea and Europe for their up-coming talent. As the market demand for pop music grew, so too did the number of talented performers. This growth of the pop music industry in China prompted the birth of dedicated music education institutions on the mainland, and for the first time it was possible to study pop music in higher education¹². The number of colleges and universities offering pop music majors soon multiplied, and with it, so too did the number of professionally trained pop singers.

¹⁰ The China Central Television Chinese New Year variety show.

¹¹ A collective of singers from Hong Kong who were hugely popular in Hong Kong and mainland China.

¹² 1993 – Shenyang Conservatory of Music opened the first popular music singing degree course.

With the emergence of such an abundance of contemporary pop singers arose a problem: how could they transmit their music to a wide audience in such a competitive market with limited media outlets available to them? This issue created fierce competition for radio airplay and TV programme slots. Performers signed to the more influential record or management companies would benefit greatly, whilst many others found themselves quickly marginalized. The late 1990's and early 2000's saw China enter the internet age, which facilitated all singers with the platform to publish and publicise their music. The number of dedicated music websites¹³ and online music programmes exploded, and it was now feasible that pop musicians and songs could become popular overnight. Netizens had instant access to all music genres and styles, and were free to listen to and download music without spending money.

Although the public were benefitting, and musicians were being given access to this massive platform, for the traditional recording industry, it was undoubtedly a hugely difficult and challenging problem to overcome. They could no longer generate the same income through record sales as was the case previously, and they were no longer deemed to be as necessary a cog in the wheel of the pop music industry.

2.6 2011 to date

From the early to mid-2000's the online platforms for music publishing continued to grow, and with that grew the general interest in pop music. This fact pushed TV production companies to take note, and 2007 saw the first music *reality* programme appear on national TV in China. It was called *Super Girl*, and took the format of a singing competition, the type of which was finding worldwide popularity at the time. This show was aimed at finding the best female pop singer from competitors within the public, and it became such a success that it spawned myriad similar programmes on mainland Chinese television.

The trend of reality pop music television continued for the rest of the decade, and 2012's introduction of *The Voice of China*, which was based on the original model *The voice of Holland* created massive interest and viewing figures on the mainland. The Voice of

¹³ www.QQmusic.com, www.Kugou.com, www.Baidumusic.com, www.Music.163.com

China was more innovative in its approach to performance so far as that the performers were encouraged to use a wide variety of musical styles in their performances. Genres as eclectic as rap, rock, R&B, jazz and metal were incorporated into the show, which had the effect of cultivating a wider interest in contemporary music than ever before.

Following on from the success of *The Voice of China*, television in mainland China has in recent years become saturated with reality music programmes. There are now many series' following this format of competing amateur singers, but also a huge number of programmes dedicated to professional pop singers, meaning that during this decade, pop music has been in the public eye more than ever before. The programmes have become a hot topic of discussion for the Chinese people, and the public now have a better appreciation and understanding of pop music.

Though it would seem at first glance that this revolution of the pop music industry of China could only be positive, the popularity of these reality shows has also raised new issues for the direction in which music creation and singer development are taking. „*The aesthetics of the audience influences the development of music.*”¹⁴

Since reality shows have started to bring huge financial gains, many management and record companies appear to have taken the decision to place their efforts and money into acquiring TV presence for their artists. This is seen as the fastest way to gain recognition and financial success, but it comes at a cost. The industry has become so money-driven and commercialized in recent years that the need for financial gain often comes at the price of integrity. There is less experimentation and individualism amongst artists' works, and pop music is losing its originality. Young singers are being seduced by the idea of acquiring a wealthy status and celebrity lifestyle rather than the desire to simply produce high quality music. The standard of pop music education in colleges and universities has also been compromised. The purpose cultivating a professional singing talent has turned to the cultivation of professional talent show contestants, with the outcome of teaching reflected in whether students can gain eligibility to participate in various television reality shows.

¹⁴ COPLAND, Aaron. *What to Listen for in Music*. New York: Mentor, 1988. ISBN 9780451627353.

3 The origin and development of pop music teaching

Typically, there are two types of pop music education. One is informal learning, through which the students have a high level of motivation to learn, and the process of self-study is used to improve their singing ability. The second type is learning through the instruction of professional teachers. This method pushes students to improve singing skills to the end of achieving learning goals. In comparison with classical vocal singing, which has been subjected to centuries of development, the method of pop music singing is still the subject of an ongoing process of exploration, research and development throughout the world. In Europe, the dedicated teaching of pop music was pioneered in Britain when, in 1994, the University of Salford commenced the first pop music degree program. Later, graduate programs were opened at locations such as the School of Popular Music at the University of Liverpool¹⁵.

Worldwide, many higher education music colleges have begun to offer degree programs in pop music singing in recent years, but because these courses are still in stages of infancy compared to the traditional vocal education courses offered, there are many arguments about the selection of teaching methods to be used for this subject. Many researchers and teachers actively draw boundaries between pop singing and classical singing; on the contrary, some researchers and teachers insist that pop singing techniques should be the same as those used for classical singing. Some other teachers suggest that essential methods should be taken from classical singing and combined with different interpretational styles of pop music. This situation has also been heatedly debated in the field of Chinese pop music education.

¹⁵ CLOONAN, Martin & HULSTEDT, Lauren. Looking for Something New: The Provision of Popular Music Studies Degrees in the UK. *Journal of the International Association for the study of popular music* [online]. University of Glasgow, 2013, vol.3, no.2 [cited 2019-01-31]. ISSN 2079-3871. Available from Internet: http://www.iaspmjournal.net/index.php/IASPM_Journal/article/view/620

3.1 The history and development of China's higher music education

There are currently eleven higher education institutions in China specializing in music: Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Central Conservatory of Music, China Conservatory of Music, Shenyang Conservatory of Music, Tianjin Conservatory of Music, Xi'an Conservatory of Music, Wuhan Conservatory of Music, Sichuan Conservatory of Music, Xinghai Conservatory of Music, Harbin Conservatory of Music and Zhejiang Conservatory of Music. In addition to these music colleges, some comprehensive universities and normal colleges also have music majors or music faculties.

In Shanghai on November 27th 1927, with the support of the famous Chinese composer Cai Yuanpei, educator and music theorist Xiao Youmei, who had recently returned to China from stays in both Japan and Germany, and the famous Chinese educator Cai Yuanpei, the first music college in Chinese history was founded - The National Music Academy. It was later to become known as the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. At the time, in addition to drawing on the professional settings of western music education institutions by opening courses on vocal music, orchestral music, composition and piano, the professional settings of the western systems were combined with the actual situation of Chinese music, and therefore the national instrumental music major provided courses for studying native instruments (pipa, erhu, flute, guqin), and classical Chinese music. History courses and Chinese classical literature courses were also integrated into the curriculum. The group music classes and culture classes involve ear training and sight singing, choral music, music theory, harmony, music appreciation, Chinese and English language.

This mode of schooling produced the first generation of Chinese music talent. The alumni went on to create many outstanding early Chinese musical works, such as Xian Xinghai's *The Yellow River Cantata*¹⁶. A number of these musicians proceeded to become the academic leaders of major music schools in China. They have passed on the philosophy of Mr. Xiao Youmei and reformed and innovated education in the field of both western and traditional Chinese music.

¹⁶ Composed in 1939 during the second Sino-Japan War. It was inspired by, and adapted the lyrics from a famous patriotic poem by poet and army general Guang Weiran.

3.2 Different stages in the development of pop music education in Chinese universities

For a long time, the vocal music education offered by Chinese music institutions was divided into two majors: classical vocal singing and national vocal singing. The classical vocal singing major specialized in education pertaining to the method of singing which was being utilised in Europe. The Chinese national vocal music major combined the musical works of various ethnic minorities in China, consisting of Chinese opera—which is divergent across localities, and folk music.

The 1990's began to see a change in the pattern of vocal music education in Chinese universities. Due to progression and diversification within the music industry and the emergence of the pop music phenomenon in China after the open-door policy had been implemented by the government, a large number of classically educated singers were witnessing the growing momentum pop music had been building within the country, and chose to move away from the traditional styles of music and align themselves with this new field. International pop music was expanding into China, and there was a growing demand for this new genre of music. The invitation given to Hong Kong and Taiwanese pop singers to perform on the CCTV Spring Festival Gala (the most watched TV programme in the world) kick-started a music revolution in China, which in turn prompted a reform in music education, resulting in pop music singing gaining status as an independent discipline in higher education music institutes.

In the article *Exploration of Chinese pop music higher education*, Chinese pop music education has been divided into two phases: Firstly, the 1990's, and secondly, 2001 onwards.

„The First stage is the Exploration stage: The Shenyang Conservatory of Music established a pop singing degree program in 1993; in 1998, the Nanjing Institute of Arts launched the Pop Music Innovations degree course, and in 2000 established the Pop Music Composition, Pop Music Singing Performance and Pop Music Instrumental Performance degree courses; Also in 2000, the Xi'an Conservatory of Music opened the Pop Singing degree program.

The second stage, 2001 onwards is titled General degree courses in music conservatories. Many music conservatories established departments or institutions

*specifically for the teaching of pop music-related subjects such as singing, composition, playing instruments, music arrangement, and recording. In 2001 the Sichuan Conservatory of Music initiated a dedicated Conservatory of Pop Music.*¹⁷

Since 2001, pop music education in Chinese higher education institutions has been developing at an incredibly fast pace, but this rate of development has created many problems worthy of attention.

In recent years the scale of pop music education in colleges and universities has been continuously growing. While historically Chinese pop music education consisted of only a single major, these days there is a multitude of degree level courses related to pop music available to prospective students. For example, pop instrumental music; that is, electro-acoustic music, is only one of a number of branches of pop music for which numerous institutes formed an independent department within a faculty of music dedicated to that particular area of study. Once instated, a department then has the ability to develop courses in order to fulfill demand.

There are now entire departments within music faculties dedicated to areas of study as varied as pop music creation, pop music production, singing, and sound engineering as major degree level courses. Although pop music education is thriving in Chinese universities, and the scale of development is growing exponentially, perhaps due to the rapidity of development, many problems and deficiencies have been exposed in both research and teaching.

The year 2006 saw the inaugural Chinese Pop Music University Forum¹⁸ take place. Leaders and teachers from all pop music education institutes within China met in order to form a consensus with regards to implementation of criteria for pop music education. The three dominant criteria to emerge from this forum were as follows: 1. Pop music will be granted status by the Ministry of Education as a discipline in its own right, and should follow clear

¹⁷ PENG, Jianhui. Exploration of Chinese pop music higher education. *Journal of exploration of music*. Si Chuan Conservatory of Music. 2012, no.4, pp. 22–25. ISSN 1004-2172.

¹⁸ The Chinese Pop Music University Forum is an annual summit involving teachers from all pop music education institutes. It facilitates the pooling of statistics, teaching methods and suggestions for future development within the pop music education field.

teaching objectives, methods and curricula; 2. The direction of teaching and teacher training should take into account the unique musical language, performance techniques and industry development, as well as aesthetic changes in pop music; 3. Theoretical studies will utilize a modern, scientific and objective curriculum.

„Pop music education should have an independent disciplinary system. It should stand shoulder to shoulder with traditional classical music education and national music education, not as a subsidiary or vassal of a certain subject.”¹⁹

¹⁹ WANG, Jianyuan. College pop music education needs to establish a catalogue of subjects. *Journal of People's Music*. Bei Jing. 2007, no.1, pp. 65–68. ISSN 0447-6573.

4 Analysis of the Setting of Pop Music Education Courses using Shenyang Conservatory of Music as an Example

In 1938 the Yan'an Lu Xun Academy of Arts was founded under the guidance of Communist leaders Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, along with the support of various other proletarian revolutionaries, as Northeast China's first institution of higher education dedicated to art and music. After several successful years the music arm of the academy branched out to form Shenyang Academy of Music which would operate independently to the Academy of Arts. The music academy provided courses within the field of western classical and Chinese folk performance.

The teaching of pop Music at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music²⁰ was first established in 1993 due to growing demand among prospective students for pop music education. At the outset, the courses offered to these prospective students consisted of only a single pop music major- the first dedicated pop music degree course in the country. By the year 2000, plans were put in place to build a department dedicated to pop music, and in 2003 the pop music department was finally in operation, offering a wide range of courses such as pop singing performance, composition, pop instrument performance and music theory. From the department's inauguration, the courses offered were categorized by the academy governor as *key subjects* for recruiting undergraduate and postgraduate students. More recently these courses have been upgraded to *specialist subjects*.

4.1 Issues connected to the structure of the teaching workforce

At the time of its establishment in 1993, the number of professional vocal teachers employed within the pop music department consisted of two classical vocal teachers (relocated from the classical singing department), one Chinese national vocal teacher and a vocal teacher based in the pedagogical department. Later, due to the rapid development of pop music during the 1990's, the pool of teachers in the department expanded in correlation to the number of prospective students showing interest in the subject.

²⁰ The author of this thesis was a student of pop music singing at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, and has been a teacher of pop singing at the institute for over nine years.

From the early 2000's, pop music related courses were among some of the most popular majors offered by the academy. In the above-mentioned teacher structure, we looked at the composition of the teaching workforce during the early years of pop music education at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music. Since the introduction of the pop music department at the conservatory there have been three main areas from where pop singing teachers have been sourced: Firstly, teachers who have long-term experience in classical or Chinese folk singing and have a certain understanding of pop music through research, as well as practical experience of pop music performance. They have predominantly been transposed from classical to pop major courses.

As pop singing is a relatively newly established discipline in China, the method of teaching it as a subject is still in its early stages. There is a lack of unified teaching materials and methods in use, therefore teachers are often pushed to rely on their own initiative, finding their personalized way to teach students through their own exploration and experience. This type of teacher draws heavily from their classical background in respect to giving instruction to the technical side of pop singing, again necessitated by the shortage of materials and information available to them. As there is a natural compulsion within these teachers to distinguish their pop music teaching methods from those which they may have used in the teaching of classical forms, there is often an over-reliance on teaching the conveyance of emotional and image-related aspects of performance, to the detriment of the more technical areas of the subject. Secondly, teachers who had previously been performers in music troupes, often connected to sectors of society such as military and emergency service institutes, were scouted by music academies to be trained as teachers of pop music singing.

There is a rich history of music troupes within the military and services in China, which harks back to the time of the Chinese civil war, when armies affiliated to the two warring parties at the time, the governing Kuomintang and the Communist Party, formed musical platoons to perform songs which proclaimed the might and greatness of their parties. The songs of the victorious Communist Party are often referred to as *Red songs*²¹. The tradition of the musical troupes continued into the age of the Cultural Revolution which lasted from 1966 to 1976,

²¹ Songs holding a communistic political narrative such as *March of the Volunteers* and *The East is Red*.

when these same troupes typically performed Chinese opera to public audiences, reciting stories of the revolution. The singers belonging to these troupes were selected for their natural ability, and were provided with vigorous training for the duration of their service. The singers are highly regarded for their talents, hence the compulsion of music education institutes to acquire them as teachers. These teachers have rich stage and social experience, and their musical backgrounds can vary widely. They may have studied western classical singing, Chinese folk music or Chinese opera. To compensate for deficiencies in their abilities to teach the technicalities of pop singing they are more inclined to cultivate students' stage presence and performance.

Thirdly, numerous graduate students of these aforementioned teachers will themselves take up the role of instructors. They have absorbed the teaching experience accumulated by their predecessors over many years, and with the fast-growing phenomenon of pop music within the country as well as the influx of western music and the expanding horizons of access to western pop music teaching theory from online sources²², they are better equipped to teach to a high standard. This third category of teachers are eager to learn, innovate and improve their teaching skills, but at the same time they are hindered by the shortage of professional materials as theoretical support available to them.

The above-mentioned issues which exist in the field of pop music singing teaching are not only confined to this one university, but are in fact inherent at a nationwide level. The crux of these issues is, in the main, determined by the developmental history of Chinese pop music. Therefore, in order to accelerate the development and progress of pop singing education in China, many higher education institute leaders are now paying more attention to recruiting comprehensive talents with outstanding professional ability, overseas study experience, and creative and performance skills.

²² www.baidu.com, www.youku.com, www.tengxun.com

4.2 Analysis of the pop singing framework and curriculum

4.2.1 Framework

Since its opening in 1993, the Shenyang Conservatory of Music has trained many outstanding singers and creative talents which has helped in augmenting the development of Chinese pop music. According to the framework management rules the curriculum syllabus is prepared by each teaching department. Within the syllabus, relevant provisions have been made for the purpose and requirements of teaching, course content and teaching materials, as well as the designation of teaching courses and examination and practice systems. The presently used syllabus and curriculum employed by the pop singing majors were written in 2010. The syllabus refines the tasks of teachers in a phased manner in terms of teaching objectives and requirements.

Since its introduction it has undergone major adjustments, and thus can be considered to be undergoing constant scrutiny and evolution. Within the framework established for the teaching of pop music singing in 2010, the purpose and requirements of teaching are clearly defined:

„Students will form their own unique singing style by studying methods of European and American pop music in combination with the singing methods of native Chinese pop music. Students' singing abilities and stage performance will be enhanced and integrated with world pop music in order to facilitate adaptation to the needs of social development and cultural markets.’’²³

4.2.2 Curriculum for the pop vocal performance undergraduate degree course

Study is divided into eight semesters which are completed over a period of four academic years at undergraduate level. Each semester has a duration of sixteen weeks. From the first to the seventh semester of the major course, 2 hours per week are dedicated to vocal lessons, consisting of one individual solo singing lesson, and one group singing lesson which entails ensemble and solo singing. The eighth semester consists of one individual solo singing lesson

²³ Shenyang Conservatory of Music Framework for Popular Music Singing internal document.

per week. In addition to the solo singing lesson, during this semester students must participate in rehearsals for the Music Practice Week²⁴ in which time the students will either attend studio recording sessions in the university recording studio, or hold a live stage performance during a concert held at the culmination of the week.

Throughout the duration of the four-year degree course, students are required to attend, in conjunction with the major course, a range of other courses related to pop music. These courses can be seen in the figure below and will be subsequently analyzed.



Figure 2: Four-year curriculum for 2007 students²⁵

²⁴ Music Practice Week is an annual event held by the Shenyang Conservatory of Music, with the aim of creating more opportunities for the students to experience live performance.

²⁵ Shenyang Conservatory of Music Framework for Popular Music Singing internal document.

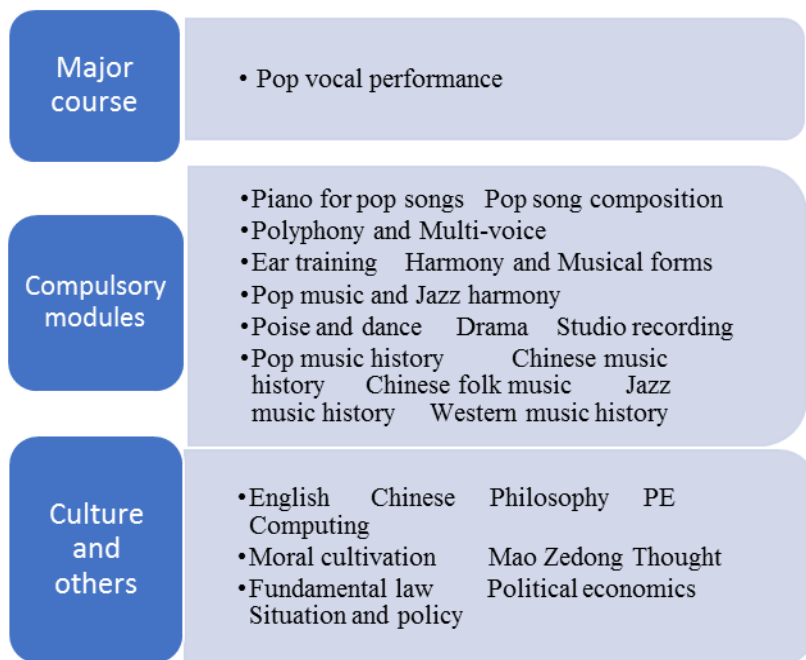


Figure 3: Four-year curriculum for 2017 students

Figures 1 and 2 show the Shenyang Conservatory of Music Pop Vocal Performance undergraduate degree course curriculum for the four-year course in 2007 and 2017 respectively. The curriculum consists of three main areas: Major course, Compulsory modules and Culture and others. It is clear to see the disparity between the two curricula, particularly with regards to the substantially higher number of compulsory modules included in the 2017 curriculum in comparison with the 2007 model. The figures demonstrate the considerable change which has taken place during this ten-year interval, and the change can be seen as being very positive. It illustrates the development that has occurred within the realms of pop music education in terms of technical instruction, variety of skills and comprehensiveness.

In order to analyze the outcomes of both curricula in comparison to each other, we will firstly examine the 2007 curriculum. For a student enrolled on the Pop Vocal Performance undergraduate course, during the four years of study there was a single solo singing lesson and one group singing lesson per week. The remaining time was spent studying subjects which come under the heading of *culture and others* which are unrelated to music, and classes consisting of the compulsory modules which, whilst music related, have no direct connection

to the specifics of pop music. All instruction on vocal technique was provided by the major subject lessons. Although modules such as ear training, harmony and music theory could provide students with music literacy and develop their musical abilities, they could not be pivotal in cultivating talents within the field of pop music, which is the purpose of the major subject.

In stark contrast to the 2007 curriculum, the model from 2017 shows that in order to adapt to the development of pop music, as well as the demand for pop music talent in modern China, there have been major adjustments made to the curriculum. Many of the pre-existing compulsory modules have been adapted or augmented with subjects relevant to the major course: The piano module has been converted into a module on piano for pop songs; the harmony module has become harmony and musical forms; and newly instated modules include; pop song composition, polyphony and multi-voice, pop music and jazz harmony, studio recording and jazz music history. The additions and adaptations made to the pop vocal performance curriculum between 2007 and 2017 could be viewed as a statement of intent made by the educators to provide a tailor-made, comprehensive and subject-specific course to students of pop singing, which consequently cultivates well-rounded and talented pop singers.

4.2.3 Examination system and performance practice

The syllabus of the Shenyang Conservatory of Music stipulates that students will undergo a process of examination upon the conclusion of each semester. The examination for students enrolled on the pop vocal performance major requires the student to perform a repertoire of songs selected by the tutor combined with songs of the students' choosing. There are no regulations as to the number, duration or genre of songs. As well as the end-of-semester examinations, there are annual rehearsals preceding the aforementioned Music Practice Week, and at a specified date during the course, students can choose to hold a non-compulsory interpretation from which they will receive feedback from instructors and classmates.

In the final year of study, students are given the (voluntary) opportunity to hold a solo Bachelor concert, which is typically organized and arranged by the students themselves. As

with other forms of vocal music, successful pop music singing requires a combination of singing ability and stage performance skills, therefore students of the subject should aim to fully immerse themselves in the participatory side of the academic sphere. They are encouraged to attend seminars and interpretations, and accumulate as much singing and stage experience as possible. It is useful guidance for students to receive; however, as is notable from the syllabus and course framework, in addition to the optional interpretation and solo concert, opportunities to perform are limited to the end-of-semester examination and the Music Practice Week activities. Thereby, if during the four-year duration of study students cannot find opportune circumstances which enable them to gain experience of performing outside of the academy campus, they will find themselves restricted to only the handful of chances which are presented by the syllabus itself.

4.2.4 Entrance examination

The criteria for acquiring entrance to pop singing degree programmes at defined music institutes has a three-step process, and differs from those at comprehensive universities. The following statement from a provincial high school education examination board gives a brief description of these processes which will be elaborated upon below.

The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and the Liaoning Provincial High School Education Admissions Examination Committee:

*„The examinations for art majors are divided into two parts: the National College Entrance Examinations and the Art Examinations. The art examinations comprise provincial admission examinations and art university entrance examinations.“*²⁶

In order to cast more light on these processes, here is a more detailed overlook: The first stage is a universal process, in that prospective art students take an examination in the discipline of which they choose to study, i.e. Pop Vocal Performance, which is done at a provincial level and consists of practical assessment of students' singing ability. For students who aim to study at specialized music institutes, e.g. the Shenyang Conservatory of

²⁶ Liaoning Provincial Admissions Office, 2018. This document states the organization of entrance examinations for art major students within Liaoning Province.

Music, the conservatory requires a certain score from the provincial examination, which, if achieved, entitles the student to enter into a further entrance examination set by the conservatory itself.

For students wishing to study in comprehensive universities (not a specialized music institute), achieving the required score from the provincial examination is satisfactory. However, successful entrance to either category of institute is then dependent on the results of the National College Entrance Examination, known in China as the *GaoKao*²⁷. This examination is taken by all students at the conclusion of their high school studies. The examination covers all non-artistic high school subjects, and failure to gain the required scores of this examination, which are stated beforehand by each higher education institute, denies the student the right to study in said institute. The scoring requirements published by the institutes are decided by the China Department of Education after evaluation of each institute's performance throughout the year. More academically demanding subject courses typically require higher scoring of the GaoKao examination.

4.2.4.1 Contents of the Liaoning Provincial Unified Examination

According to the regulations of the Liaoning Provincial Art Classification Examination, the pop singing professional examination candidate will select two pop songs to perform. The total duration of the performance cannot exceed eight minutes, and the candidates must provide their own accompaniment music in compact disk form.

4.2.4.2 Shenyang Conservatory of Music entrance examination

In the *2019 Shenyang Music College Undergraduate Admissions Professional Examination Requirements* document²⁸, it is stated that candidates who apply for the pop vocal performance major are required to pass a two-step assessment; a primary test and secondary test. The primary test consists of a performance of two songs of the student's choosing. After

²⁷ *GaoKao* is the Chinese language word for the National College Entrance Examination. *Gao* translates into English as *high*, and *Kao*, *examination*.

²⁸ 2019 Shenyang Music College Undergraduate Admissions Professional Examination Requirements document. Available from the Internet:
http://www.sycm.com.cn/display_son.aspx?Vid=-1&Nid=11907&DWid=66

completion of the primary test, the results will be published on the Conservatory's official website.

The students who successfully pass the primary test will then advance to the secondary test. This step requires the student to again perform two pop songs of their choosing, yet different in content from the songs performed in the primary test. The next portion of the secondary test is a declamation assessment. Students have one minute to declaim a piece of poetry, prose, fable, fairytale, monologue or similar content. This part of the test is designed to show a student's speech clarity and emotional expression. The final part of the secondary test consists of a written music theory test paper, followed by ear training and sight singing assessments²⁹. Students to successfully complete the secondary test will then, contingent on acquiring the necessary National College Entrance Examination results, be offered a place on the major course.

4.2.4.3 National College Entrance Examination

Candidates who apply for art major admissions, in accordance with the regulations of the Ministry of Education, must participate in the National College Entrance Examination. Though held countrywide, it is governed provincially. In 2019, Liaoning province implemented a program titled *3 + comprehensive liberal arts / comprehensive science*. The 3 refers to three mandatory subjects: Chinese, Mathematics and English Language. Comprehensive liberal arts comprises Politics, History and Geography, and Comprehensive science includes Chemistry, Biology and Physics. The liberal art and science parts are interchangeable, though it is mandatory for students to select one of these subject configurations.

²⁹ The ear training assessment tests students' ability to identify pitches, melody, intervals, chords, rhythm and other elements of music by sound alone. The sight singing assessment tests students' ability to read and sing a piece of music in music notation which the student has not seen before.

5 Recommendations for reform of Chinese pop music education

Since the establishment of China's inaugural pop singing major degree course at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music in 1993, Chinese pop music education had undergone 26 years of development and evolution. During this period of time the number of higher education institutions providing pop music programmes has been increasing exponentially year upon year in correlation with the demands of prospective students from across the breadth of the country.

Corresponding to the occurrence, the number of qualified pop music educators within universities, colleges, academies and conservatories throughout China has also radically increased. Many of these teachers have dedicated themselves to research and exploration of teaching methods. And moreover, a large number of Chinese pop music education institutions have built, and then strengthened, ties with western institutes within their field of study, and this has led to a high ratio of international student and teacher exchanges, which has had a profound effect on raising the standards of the system of pop music education in China. Curricula has been overhauled and reformed throughout these 26 years, and is under a constant state of scrutiny, while knowledge and ideas gained from relationships between Chinese and foreign institutes have been imparted on the native systems and models of education.

Though it is worthy of expressing admiration for the advancements that have been made, it must be kept in mind that, as has been covered in this work already, the education of pop music in China is still in a relative stage of infancy. Development over time is not a foregone conclusion. It is more often than not a matter of taking a *trial and error* approach in looking for ways to hasten the positive developments that are there to be made. The same approach could also, in certain facets, apply to the students themselves.

Learning a subject is a step-by-step process through which what works for one student may not work for another; especially in relation to the study of music. For subjects which are in more advanced stages of development, successful methods and approaches of study are already evident. For example, a novice student of Chinese language would most probably

begin by learning how to read and write using the pinyin system³⁰. This is a proven method of gaining an initial understanding of the subject from which students can build using other established methods. Pop music singing, on the other hand, has its own peculiarities which distinguish itself from other subjects of study.

As the name suggests, pop music is the most popular form of music. By definition, most pop songs are simple in structure and memorable to the ear, therefore making it more accessible to the myriad enthusiasts and self-taught amateurs who enjoy singing pop songs without having undertaken any form of professional training. Unfortunately, within the Chinese music education system, this characteristic has led many educators and students engaged in other disciplines of music to hold a prejudicial opinion of pop music singers. The art is often viewed as a discipline which requires little skill to perform in comparison to more classical forms of singing, and as a relatively modern form of music, pop can be seen to some as lacking in technique.

This recurrent and negative perspective held by some within the institutions of Chinese music education leads to the manifestation that, to this day, pop music education is in a disadvantaged position in academic circles, although it is loved by the educators and students of pop music alike.

The perpetual growth of the phenomenon that is pop music education in China can largely be attributed to the needs of the music market, but pop music and its singing have its own historical and cultural background rooted much deeper than many Chinese are aware. If only analyzed from the standpoint of the economic benefits and social effects of pop music instead of aiming for development from the source of the research, and providing students with a thorough understanding of the background of the music, the result will be a basic repetition and imitation of European and American pop singers and their music. In order to prevent the previously mentioned prejudices and allow the subject develop long-term, deeper reflection is imperative: What is real pop music and pop music education in China? What is its

³⁰ Pinyin is the official Romanization system for standard Chinese language. The system uses four diacritics for denoting tones.

academic value? Over time, how should pop music education develop, and what can or can't be changed?

5.1 How to define pop music higher education

Establishing any new discipline of study firstly necessitates clarification of teaching content and its objectives. The problematic issues rooted in the Chinese pop music education system which have been covered earlier in this work make it fair to surmise that some institutes at this stage are not yet clear about the purpose and scope of pop music singing, many of these institutes make the unfortunate mistake of misconstruing the terms pop music and popular music.

Pop music, as a genre of popular music, is ever-changing. In order to adapt to the changes taking place, it should be obligatory to constantly review materials such as student textbooks so as to keep up to date with current trends within the genre. Popular music, on the other hand, consists of a broad spectrum of musical genres, from jazz, rap and soul, to disco and blues. Therefore, popular music education should involve deep examination of each musical style, their unique cultural and historical backgrounds, and context of varied works. If the concept of pop music continues to be misinterpreted, it will mislead the direction of the subject, the purpose of teaching and the goal of training.

Within the teaching of pop music singing, ideally a framework will be defined in such a way as to allow students to progress in clearly defined stages by following a learning curve of progressive song difficulty. Students would also develop technique and comprehension if instructed to practice songs containing a variety of stylistic influences. With regards to popular music singing education, course content needs to be refined into multiple branches, enabling the student to study various genres from the perspective of historical development of style, development of musical works and singing techniques. Education institutes should select teachers with consideration to their ability to sing and teach multiple genres, or for their specialization in a genre which is classified as a popular music. In this respect, we can follow the example of what is arguably the world's most advanced pop music education institute; the Berkeley Music Institute in the United States, which clearly states its student-centered teaching approach on the front page of its vocal music website.

„For you, music is not a hobby; it is going to be your career. We provide individualized instruction in all contemporary music styles, including jazz, pop, rock, and theater, and prepare you for both concert performance and studio work. We offer you professional faculty specialists, course work specifically designed to enhance your talents and abilities, and myriad performance opportunities. We know how voice fits into today's music world, and we give it the respect it deserves.”³¹

5.2 Vocal teacher and student selection principle

Within the Chinese pop music singing domain, the teacher-student relationship contains many subtle nuances. After commencement of a programme of study, a student may study from a particular teacher for the entirety of the course, which at undergraduate level is four years. The lessons with the vocal teacher are mainly taught one-to-one, and over time it is common that a strong relationship between teacher and student will be forged. This phenomenon is likely to occur between music teachers and students across the globe, but is perhaps most prominent within Chinese schools, and is deeply rooted in cultural philosophy.

In ancient China, whether it be related to music, drama or visual arts such as pottery, painting, calligraphy and suchlike, teacher and student were considered in reality to be master and apprentice. The apprentice enters through the door of the master, whereby the master teaches the apprentice the skills which will enable him to earn money with which he can feed his family. The master passes on his craft, which the apprentice will learn to master himself, and in the process creating what is akin to a father-son relationship. This is an historical, cultural tradition that is ingrained in the mentality of Chinese people. And although society is constantly progressing and developing, the virtue of respecting teachers in Chinese culture continues to this day. However, the inheritance of this kind of etiquette can present problematic issues which could, to a certain extent, negatively affect the student's learning. For instance, students who may be unsatisfied with the instruction they are receiving, or perhaps have a preference to study from a different teacher, find themselves unable to change their situation due to a fear of showing disrespect to their existing teacher.

³¹ <https://www.berklee.edu/voice>

The system used in Chinese pop music institutes for the pairing of students and teachers is something which is in need of modernizing, and for this undertaking, the system employed by Berklee College of Music is worthy of examining. This system involves students being allocated a teacher for the first semester of study, and at the conclusion of the semester each student is permitted to, if they so wish, elect a new teacher for the following term. Accordingly, students can nominate a teacher who specializes in the specific aspect of singing they want to pursue, whether that be to add a new style of singing to their range, for instance jazz, blues, rock or musical theatre, or perhaps concentrate more time to working on a particular vocal technique.

Upon nomination of a specific teacher for the following semester, the selected teacher can decide whether or not to accept the student. This system facilitates students to expand their abilities, and offers a multitude of possibilities as to the direction their studies take in comparison to the system in operation within China.

5.3 A comparison of pop and classical singing techniques

Chinese students complete high school education at the age of 18 or 19, and the large majority of school leavers aspire to enter higher education. The depth of subjects offered by universities can be overwhelming for an adolescent trying to decide how the next four years of his or her life will be spent. Societal pressure leads many of these students to determine a path of study based on what prospects a subject will offer upon completion of their education. Accordingly, this viewpoint can have the effect of every year pushing innumerable students to enroll on degree courses for subjects in which they have no passion. There are also students who do have a passion and a clearly defined aim to study a particular subject. Students who choose to enroll on pop music singing courses by-and-large fit into this category. There are very few students who would choose to study this subject without already possessing a love of singing.

Upon commencement of a student's studies, it becomes the teacher's duty to nurture this passion for singing into a perceptible ability which enables the student to forge a career within the field of the pop music. Through professional, targeted training, students should develop their singing skills, musical comprehension and creativity.

As is the case with classical music, pop music education has the function of developing a student's vocal technique and knowledge of music theory; for example, breath control, resonance, extended range, emotional expression, rhythm and interval, as well as skills and abilities of music creation. The well-trained pop singer has the ability to perform with bands and orchestras, and should have a firm grasp on various forms of singing styles, such as rock, folk and jazz. These skills are imperative to the successful pop singer due to the ever-changing and evolving nature of the music itself.

Throughout its history, pop singers have often been misunderstood as having a deficiency of talent and technical ability compared to some other types of singers. If this were to be true, then there would be no value in the study of pop singing. If technique and ability were not required, any amateur pop singer could be successful, and pop singing education would become redundant. In her book *The Contemporary Singer*, author and teacher Anne Peckham contemplated the issue:

„In my teaching experience, I have heard a lot of nonsense about vocal training. For example, pop singers don't need training. But in fact, many young singers were surprised to find that the truly untrained singer, whose voice was damaged due to improper methods, eventually led to a career interruption. Even experienced singers with some bad singing habits sometimes have to relearn, otherwise they will risk being permanently damaged. Another nonsense about vocal learning is that it makes the singer lose its unique, natural sound. On the contrary, vocal learning can help you to improve your vocal performance and enhance the most natural sound quality ...”³²

As described previously, during the early years of pop music education in China, numerous teachers of classical singing were transferred from classical music departments into newly formed departments of pop music. It is an onerous responsibility for any teacher to divert from the teaching of a subject in which they are experienced to one so new, but being pop teachers, there was a need to distinguish their methods from the classical style in which they were trained, by avoidance of employing the scientific classical vocal music techniques they

³² PECKHAM, Anne. *The Contemporary Singer*. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2009. p. 16. ISBN 978-7-103-03717-1.

had previously used. Only the basic breathing and resonance techniques were carried over into the teaching of pop singing. Many classical singing techniques were abandoned by teachers and soon became redundant. They were viewed as being superfluous to the pop singer; a misconception which is detailed below.

It is common practice for a teacher of classical singing to instruct students in techniques designed for warming-up the body and voice. These techniques are extensive, and through repeated use become routine for singers. They serve a purpose of relaxing the body, controlling breathing, extending the vocal range and improving intonation and inflection. The singer's body and voice control is maximized when preparation involves a comprehensive and effective warm-up routine. Commonly used techniques include humming³³, or lip rolling³⁴; both of which help the singer to find a sense of fluidity and resonance, while also relaxing the tongue, chin and neck. Teachers will usually instruct beginner students to use smaller intervals and shorter range scales for these exercises. The semitones will move upward and downward, and for this exercise the student firstly sings *brumendo*. The second stage involves practicing the same scale using a *brrr* lip roll. When the student feels relaxed and in good condition, they can move on to vowels such as *A*, *E*, *I*, *O* and *U*.



Figure 4: Exercise 1

This kind of vocal training method is also applicable to the teaching of pop singing. After the students' singing ability reaches a certain level, the form of scale and rhythm can also be changed on the basis of this training, which is closer to the practical application of pop music works. For example, blending jazz-style rhythm in practice.

³³ The lips are closed when the sound is made, and the upper and lower teeth are slightly opened and relaxed, so that both sides of the nose and the lips have a feeling of vibration.

³⁴ Exhale through the mouth keeping the articulation tract relaxed. The air passing through the lips will create a *Brrr* sound.

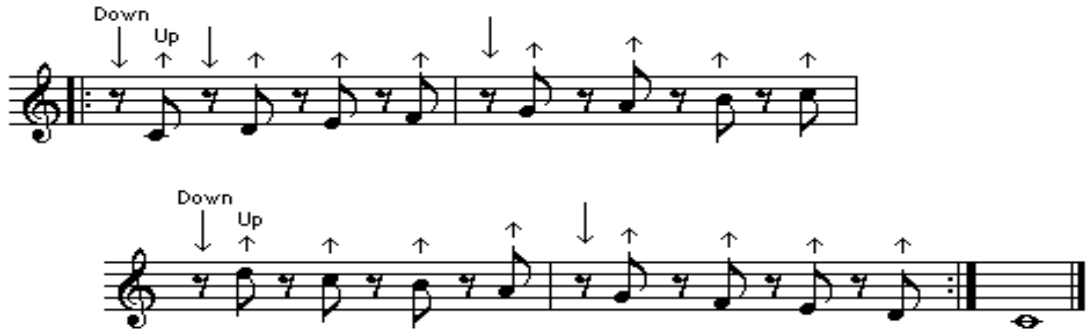


Figure 5: Exercise 2

Breath is the foundation of sound. This is a point that teachers of singing, whether classical or pop, need to emphasize to their students. The teaching of breath training, as a vocal teacher, necessitates not only demonstrating how to correctly inhale and exhale, but also to explain the working principle of the respiratory organs in order that students can have a thorough understanding of the mechanism of their own respiratory organs and muscles such as the diaphragm, chest and lungs.

Clear understanding of these procedures from a theoretical angle is easily obtained, but having the capability to put this theory into practice during singing is an altogether more difficult matter, and until the techniques of breath control are mastered, the singer cannot perform at an optimum level. German soprano and voice teacher Lilli Lehmann articulated her own method of breath control in her book *How to sing*:

„How do I breathe now?

My diaphragm I scarcely draw in consciously, my abdomen never; I feel the breath fill my lungs, and my upper ribs expand. Without raising my chest especially high, I force the breath against it, and hold it fast there. At the same time, I raise my palate high and prevent the escape of breath through the nose. The diaphragm beneath reacts against it, and furnished pressure from the abdomen. Chest, diaphragm, the closed epiglottis, and the raised

palate all form a supply chamber for the breath. Only in this way is the breath under the control of the singer, through the pressure against the chest tension muscles.”³⁵

The text illustrates the working of the breathing apparatus through inhalation very concisely, as well as noting methods for controlling the process. Although the book was first published in 1902, the content is still scientifically relevant today. The age of the book indicates that it was intended as a guide for teachers and singers of classical songs, however, the methods and techniques contained within are effective for singers of all genres of music including modern types. Vocal training is a complex and multi-faceted science. We not only need to understand the working principle of vocal organs and muscles, but also have the capacity to control them in such a way to promote a healthy voice and provide support for optimal singing, while also creating a platform for the delivery of emotional expression.

Having undergone centuries of development, both theoretical and practical, classical singing method could now be said to have reached a high state of maturity. Pop singing, on the other hand, is still subject to ongoing development, and while the techniques associated with classical singing can often be applied to the singing of pop music, every type of singing has particularities which demand their own distinct methods of training. This point is asserted in a paper published by *the American Academy of Teachers of Singing*:

„Classical and CCM genres often demand significantly different strategies concerning voice registers. Typically, classical training seeks to blend registers into a seamless whole: the voice is expected to sound essentially the same at all pitches and dynamic levels. This is not the case in many areas of CCM, which often stylistically demand strongly separated registers, as in the example of belting or traditional yodeling. Regardless of the physiologic and acoustic mechanisms by which these sounds are produced, the final product is different, often extremely so. Though many singers perform successfully in both classical and CCM

³⁵ LEHMANN, Lilli. *How to sing*. New York: Macmillan, 1902. 3rd Edition, 1924, republished: Mineola, NY: Dover, 1993. (English version of *Meine Gesangskunst*) Translation: Richard Aldrich, p. 23.

styles, the vocal techniques required to produce those styles are not likely to be interchangeable.”³⁶

The variances between different styles of singing are vast, and mastery of their individual techniques and methods can only be achieved through long-term training. It would be unbecoming to sing a classical work in the manner of a pop singing style and vice-versa. Classical singing technique relies on the ability to carry the voice in a powerful bearing, whereas pop singing technique usually employs a softer, more natural approach, hence the necessity for artificial amplification through the means of microphone and speaker. Lehmann touches on the variables of the classical voice in comparison with the natural voice in the aforementioned book *How to sing*:

„In what does artistic singing differ from natural singing?

In a clear understanding of all the organs related in voice production, and their functions, singly and together; in the understanding of the sensations in singing, conscientiously studied and scientifically explained; in a gradually cultivated power of contracting and relaxing the muscles of the vocal organs, that power culminating in the ability to submit them to severe exertions and keep them under control. The prescribed tasks must be mastered so that they can be done without exertion, with the whole heart and soul, and with complete understanding.”³⁷

Through the expression of this quotation, we can determine that it is imperative for the artistic singer to pay attention to breathing, resonance, the position of the sound, and to effectively control the use of singing skills in order to make the sound concentrated and powerful. When the singer stands on a stage without the assistance of amplification equipment, the singer's voice must be transmitted to every corner of the concert hall, into the ears of each audience member. If vocalised in a manner of pop singing, the sound will be lost, and the audience

³⁶ American Academy of Teachers of Singing. In Support Of Contemporary Commercial Music (Nonclassical) Voice Pedagogy. *Journal of Singing* [online]. 2008, volume 65, no.1 [cited 2018-12-07]. ISSN 1086-7732. Available from Internet: <https://www.nats.org/featured-article.html>

³⁷ LEHMANN, Lilli. *How to sing*. New York: Macmillan, 1902. 3rd Edition, 1924, republished: Mineola, NY: Dover, 1993. (English version of *Meine Gesangskunst*) Translation: Richard Aldrich, p. 13.

disconnected. On the contrary, a pop song performed with the use of electrical amplification, but in a classical style with unwavering accuracy of note and power of vocalization, the song would lose its sense of freedom and character.

Conclusion

The introduction of pop music education in China occurred at a much later time than in countries within Europe and America, yet, as of now, the number of institutes supplying higher education pop singing degree courses in China far exceeds that of that of both England and the USA-two of the biggest markets for pop music. However, due to its more recent emergence, it is still in the early stages of development, and as the genre of music does not have such a long and storied background within the country, Chinese pop music institutes lack resources for the study of the cultural and historical origins of the music, nor the theoretical understanding or concrete teaching methods.

If China's pop music education system is to sufficiently develop, it will require more endeavor on the part of the education institutes by way of the creation of ties with the institutions of nations possessing more developed education systems. In order for these developments to take place, further academic exchange with foreign higher education institutes is vital, as is the introduction of more advanced teaching material than is currently in use. Teachers should be encouraged to broaden their knowledge of pop music, and be provided with regular teacher training focused on modernizing their approach to teaching.

Of course, each institute has its own orientation in the development of pop music education. Some may aim to cultivate a homogenous type of pop performer, others may focus on the compositional aspect of pop music, but there must be a unified framework in place amongst all institutions which firstly states a clear definition of the subject itself, while also systemizing a modern approach to teaching theory and methods. Only with a solid theoretical foundation can teaching be performed to a standard which facilitates development within students of the subject.

Prejudices towards pop music education and the music itself need to be eradicated, and objectivity promoted, so that the importance of scientifically sound training skills for all types of singers can be realized. Not only must scientific and effective training skills be integrated into the classroom, but also the corresponding training for newly employed teachers, because for a teacher, knowledge and methods are more important than their individual ability of singing. The teaching curriculum must increase the proportion of stage practice allocated to

students, because many students of pop music aspire to become a professional singers or musicians, making stage experience invaluable.

In the context of the current pop singing education system, graduates are unprepared for a career as professional singers. Although many have a good ability to sing, other aspects such as song composition, recording techniques and stage performance ability are often lacking. After completion of study, opportunities for real-world practice and continued cultivation of these skills are very scarce. Some are fortunate or gifted enough to be noticed by a record company, some step into teaching, and many more fall by the wayside and give up on their ambitions of a career in the pop music industry. I hope that through the research and reflection of this article, it can provide some constructive opinions for the future of Chinese pop music education. I also hope that in the near future we will see Chinese pop musicians on the international stage, making a big splash in the world of pop music. Perhaps even winning a Grammy.

In this thesis were used citations from scientific literature, translations of Chinese texts were made by the author.

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