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By Xiang Jie & Duan-Rong Lin

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THE RESEARCH ON DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEACHING CHORAL MUSIC IN NON-PROFESSIONAL MUSIC COLLEGES IN CHINA

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The Research on Development of the Teaching Choral Music in Non-Professional Music Colleges in China

Xiang Jie ^α & Duan-Rong Lin ^σ

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1. INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE CHORAL MUSIC

The development of choral singing is connected to the training of specialist teachers, and making sure those teachers are not only in the specialist musical academies is important. Music is closely associated with young children's cognitive and social development (Elliott and Silverman, 2015; Barrett et al., 2019), and in choral activities, it fosters community and emotional wellbeing. The value of choral singing comes from the fact that it involves different kinds of musical aesthetics and musical thinking. This helps musical aesthetics and cognitive development in some ways, changing how we see the world and how they experience it through music (Chen et al., 2023, p. 185; Yo, 2016; Xie and Leung, 2011).

Author α: Teacher of Xiangxi Vocational and Technical College for Nationalities, China No.1, Wuling Mountain Avenue, Jishou City, Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Hunan.
e-mail: 1064007674@qq.com

Author σ: Director of the Chinese Art Therapy Association Hong Kong.
e-mail: art_therapy@hotmail.com

Even though choral music is an important part of higher music education in China, the first choral classes did not start until the early 1900s (Huang, 2022, para. 1). There is no proof that China has a choral tradition, and there are not even many choral components in Chinese folk music (Huang, 2022, para. 3). Up until the end of the 19th century, when China lagged behind in economic and military growth, European music had a significant influence on Chinese musical modernism (Mittler, 2020, p. 160). Early in the 20th century, China introduced a new educational system, and at the same time, modern musical education in China got its start with the Chinese school songs (xuetang yuege 学堂歌) (Huang, 2022, para. 3; Yu, 2017, pp. 1–15). Most of the songs in Xuetang yuege were new versions of songs that had already been published in Japan, Europe, or the United States. The lyrics were written in Chinese. Most of these songs' composers have international educational backgrounds (Huang, 2022, para. 3).

China has not always had a smooth path for developing choral education and music education in general. During the Cultural Revolution, which took place from 1966 to 1969, all music lessons were stopped (Xiang, 2018). Also, after this time, music was taught without a formal curriculum, formal textbooks, or a unified teaching plan until the 1970s (Xiang, 2018, p. 422). This period impacted the availability of music specialists in the coming decades, and by 1956 there were only 20 specialist music colleges in the whole of China (Xiang, 2018). This has improved; today, China has approximately 100 professional music schools and colleges of music (Li and Burapajana, 2022, pp. 1043–1044), but the number of conductors trained each year is insufficient to meet society's needs. Li and Burapajana (2022, p. 1044) say that colleges of professional music are the best place to learn how to play music. But because there are not enough professors of chorus conducting, many colleges do not work to improve the way they teach chorus.

After the People's Republic of China was created in the 1950s, many important cities started professional choruses, which were followed by many amateur choirs (Huang, 2022, para. 4). This promoted Chinese choral activities. In 1951, Liu Zhi's "Charming

Xinjiang" for female choir became a national hit, inspiring new folk song arrangements (Yu, 2017). Wang Weiliang arranged traditional songs for Peking's 1953-founded Northern Shaanxi Women's Choir. Their natural voices and regional accents helped the choir become popular. Chinese choral music now emphasizes folk song arrangements (Huang, 2022, paras. 4–5).

Chinese choral music has advanced greatly in recent decades, and Chinese choral compositions have multiplied and varied. Tan Dun and Chen Yi became international composers with their choral works. These pieces show their choral and Chinese traditional music skills (Chan, 1994).

China is also becoming increasingly choral (Huang, 2022, para. 9). First, commercial choral performances and concerts dominated the music market. Professional choirs like the Shanghai Rainbow Chamber Choir influence the music industry (Rose and Qiangwei, 2019, p. 107). They have fans like celebrities. Second, as choral music education has become essential, school choirs have been created from kindergarten through college. Rose and Qiangwei (2019) say that Western and Chinese choral repertoires are taught to show how flexible the genre is.

Given the increasing profile of choral music in China, teaching is important. Some of the problems that have been found are a lack of top-level national guiding papers, trained teachers, class hours, and a difference between how the materials are designed and how they are used (Hongxing and Zhen, 2019, p. 1).

This thesis presents the situation outside the professional music colleges, and asks how effective the emotional quality of the teaching is, connecting students to the emotion of the choral traditions.

II. RESEARCH MOTIVATION

A personal interest in music and an awareness of how little research has been done specific to colleges was the motivation for the research. Most current research papers are about how to teach younger children, not how to teach college students. Current research is also connected to a more general strategy in music pedagogy as opposed to the specifics of pedagogy in choral technique.

III. RESEARCH PURPOSE

This study looks at the research that has already been done on how choral music is taught in China's non-professional music colleges and how students' emotional skills are developed. In other words, effective choral singing will be achieved when students connect to the emotion within the songs, this develops over time with good teaching.

An extended literature review will explore the existing research that influences choral singing, looking at the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the pedagogical approaches.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To what extent does a rural location impact the teaching and quality of choral singing in Chinese colleges?

How important for students valuing singing at college level is their participation in schools?

Do schools adequately prepare students for college music and choral delivery?

Are teachers adequately trained for teaching choral skills in non-specialized Chinese educational colleges?

Is it possible to assess the emotional quality of choral education?

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

a) *Theories of Choral Music in China*

- 1) The basic theories being addressed in this section are:
- 2) The traditional textbook theories for choral instruction.
- 3) Scientific understanding on how the voice works.
- 4) Theories of emotional connection to choral music.

The two main areas of chorus instruction in China at the moment are vocal performance and stage performance (Nie and Phu-ngamdee, 2022, p. 9448). This section looks at the theoretical position of teaching chorus singing and how there has been an over reliance on the traditional textbook approach, due to a lack of qualified staff, low levels of specialism in this field outside of the professional academies of music. Although this paper connects to the teaching of choral music in the college setting, college education is the product of teaching in the early years of schooling. If interest and skills are not sparked there, a strong desire to learn is not likely to happen when other goals, like college and work, come up.

Choral singing is based on a scientific understanding of how the voice works, but textbook explanations and lessons are not enough to teach it (Hongxing and Zhen 2019). The tone of the chorus affects how it sounds, and the tone of the chorus and the solo are different (Hongxing and Zhen, 2019). The one-of-a-kind, formant-focused solo vocal music training is unparalleled. It must also include sound training for SATB (mixed-gender groups), harmony and pitch practice, sound uniformity training, and so on. (Xu, 2009). Choral singing should avoid solo singing, and emphasize harmony (Hongxing and Zhen, 2019, pp. 2–3). The teacher should also think about the voices of the students, explain how singing works scientifically, and coordinate the timbres of the chorus members to make a tone that is soft and delicate, a voice that is clear and in tune, and a sound that is balanced and full of different sounds (Tan, 2015).

In a setting where people do not specialize, it is hard to keep up the same level of teaching as a specialist. A non-specialist teacher may not have a personal connection to the music and may be unfamiliar with it. Chorus teachers must have strong theoretical and practical backgrounds (Hongxing and Zhen, 2019). Vocal, instrumental, and theoretical professors teach "chorus and conducting" courses nowadays. A lack of good teachers makes scientific and organized teaching impossible. (Hongxing and Zhen, 2019, p. 5, citing Zhu, 2006).

Concerning choral singing, the development of emotional quality is important because the true chorus should come from the heart and be full of love and pleasure (Nie and Phu-ngamdee, 2022). In order to sing moving music, Nie and Phu-ngamdee (2022, p. 9448) consider that we must fully grasp the essence of choral works in order to study choral aesthetics. Both Liu Yuan (2004) and Nie and Phu-ngamdee (2022) connect this aim to the cultivation of "applied talents." The creation and development of chorus groups are crucial for achieving this objective. Yuan wrote in 2004 that we should put more emphasis on developing students' all-around skills, such as their ability to perceive, their sense of beauty, their ability to teach, and their ability to do theoretical research, so that they can develop artistic talents as well as master the techniques and skills of different kinds of works. For this goal to be reached, it is important to start and grow chorus groups, which is part of how choral music is taught. We should put more focus on helping students develop all-around skills like perceptual ability, aesthetic ability, teaching ability, and theoretical research ability (Nie and Phu-ngamdee, 2022, p. 9453). This will help students develop their artistic talents as well as master the technology and skills required for various types of work.

Looking at classroom delivery, Wang Fangying (2021, p. 15) raises many of the concerns about non-specialist teachers and the overuse of traditional methods driven by a textbook. Fangying (2021) says that teachers still use the traditional theoretical teaching method when teaching the Chinese singing style. This shifts the style toward the idea of technical supremacy and makes it easier for students to learn music. Despite the skills gradually improving, the singing style is becoming more uniform (Fangying, 2021, pp. 15–16). It is hard to teach Chinese choral singing styles with this type of pedagogy because students do not develop the right traits, learning abilities, or employment levels. It is also hard to make good teaching materials for Chinese choral singing styles (Fengying, 2021, pp. 15–16). If music is to emotionally connect to the listener, then it should not be overly mechanical. Fengying calls the choral displays "one thousand persons" (Fengying, 2021, p. 52) because the singers, clothes, and styles are getting more and more alike. Not only are tone and technology talked about, but so are the singers' similar

bright clothes, their many feelings, and their supposedly dignified mechanical movements. This type of national "academician" singer, for Fengying (2021), is lacking in vibrant personal emotional connection to the music; they are one of the thousand. In order to teach in a scientific way, academic Chinese singing style pedagogy gives more weight to technology than style and uses a single westernized aesthetic standard to measure the country's many different styles of singing (Fengying, 2021, p. 52). Because of this, national vocalists sound the same, have the same style, and do not have much of a personality (Fengying, 2021, p.52).

VI. RESEARCH METHODS

The research method selected in this paper will be an extensive literature review, and wants to understand the most basic situation from the literature first. McNabb (2008) wrote that a literature review demonstrates to the study's target audience that the author is aware of the significant advancements made in the research field by other authors. Essentially, the literature aids in highlighting the main problems in the field of study and glaring gaps in the body of knowledge. The literature review, for McNabb (2008) aids the readers of the study in understanding the concepts and theories that the author has applied throughout the investigation.

The methodology is different as there is no gathering of primary data. Therefore, the following steps describe the location and selection of literature: This is referred to as a search method as well. The search strategy shows how to narrow down the literature review to find the most important research and interesting topics and Brown (2006) breaks the review into five distinctive validity criteria: the readership and authority, its purpose, scope and format. This is presented in the following section and takes the form of a search strategy table, which replaces the customary "methodology" section (Flick, 2018, pp. 32–34).

The criteria for inclusion and exclusion, when they were used, and why filters like publication date, country of origin, and language of publication fall under the category of the search method. Initial steps to look at available material were through the search model (Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research Type), common in social sciences research, which was used to assist in establishing the strategy. This was done to find articles that might not have mentioned these (so as to be as thorough as possible, since the college part of the question makes it much harder to find studies). Initial scoping searches that used AND to separate the "Sample" (S) and "Phenomenon of Interest" (PI) failed to turn up any information, furthermore the inclusion of "emotion" created problems, only Gannett (2017) connecting emotion with teaching choral work. This might have happened as a result of papers occasionally confusing

the sample and the phenomenon of interest and leaving out both. The decision was made to employ OR between S and PI, for example:

Phenomenon of Interest: Choral Singing and Emotional Content and Teaching.

Sample: Non-Professional Music Colleges in China

The design and collection of the initial literature review

Database name	Keywords/phrases used	Database headings used	Search limits (inclusions/exclusions)	No. of results
JSTOR	China, Choral Singing, emotion, non-professional colleges.	None	None	139 Of which only one was relevant.
Google Scholar	As above.	None	None	1403. Of which 3 were directly relevant.
Research Gate				17,300 of which 2 were directly relevant
<p><i>Comment:</i> This was an unfiltered 'global' search to establish the quantity and variety of research. In particular, noting the amount of primary, empirical data available on the topic before drilling down, it was notable how limited the specific connections to the non-professional colleges in China were.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SECTION 2</p>				
A range of data bases were then used removing many of the filters and opening up the current field.	China and teaching choral music	None	None	105,000 plus. Ranging from using choral music in Chinese fast food environments to birth music.
<p><i>Comment:</i> Experimented with opening up to encompass more research however, results too large to assess for relevancy. Need to be more specific.</p>				
			None	65
<p><i>Comment:</i> To improve the quality of search, aim to narrow the results to books and journals that are specific to choral teaching and the results in China.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SECTION 3</p>				
Proquest Scribd (for eBooks) Research Gate Google Scholar SAGE	China + choral pedagogy & colleges		Inclusions Academic journals Peer reviewed eBooks 2010 – 2023 Exclusions - English language - Those not related to education, for example: fast foods and competitive choral singing.	32 sources
<p><i>Comment:</i> Applied inclusion and exclusion limiters to funnel most current / relevant / quality research. Also, aimed to standardize the search by focusing on colleges where possible. Some general books on educational techniques of music were useful.</p>				



a) *Hypothesis*

Choral singing at college may be inhibited by the lack of specialized teachers in a non-professional environment.

Students in rural environments suffer from parental disdain for music and the arts over academic subjects.

Rural students lack access to the best qualified teaching professionals.

China is seeing a division between the older connections of choral music to the red music of the state, and newer millennial interest with the choral groups that address their motivations and likes.

VII. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

a) *Lack of Specialists*

Several papers point out that there are not enough trained music specialists (Reimer, 1989) (Mei and Yang, 2021). Current pre-teacher music training in China involves education at one of four different types of institutions: (1) a music conservatory, (2) music programs at general and comprehensive universities; (3) teacher preparation colleges, and (4) specialized teacher training institutes (Yu, 2016, pp. 1–15). Typically, Type 2 or Type 3 universities train the majority of primary or secondary school music teachers, whereas Type 1 institutions cultivate music professionals, and Type 4 institutions serve the pre-school level (Yu, 2016).

In a study done by Zhou (2012) with 30 music teachers and 800 students in Yulin City in north China, the amount of time spent on music lessons dropped significantly in the last year of primary school (from all required hours to 60%) and even more in junior secondary schools (from 80% to 20%) (Yang and Welch, 2019, pp. 8–9, citing Zhou 2019). Of the teachers who taught music full-time, 60% of them had bachelor's degrees (or above) in the subject, which led the majority of students to claim to "enjoy music" in general. It was revealed that 30% of the music teachers and 70% of the students disliked music classes, and 90% of the students thought that music was a pointless subject because they thought the teaching materials were weak (Yang and Welch, 2019, p. 9).

b) *The advent of technology*

These are the issues that need to be addressed in Chinese education if choral singing is to progress. Xiang (2018) showed that education has changed a lot in the 21st century. Music has taken advantage of many of the benefits of technology, which have also helped choral singing. The Chinese government says in 2012 that it hopes new technology will make it easier to play music in the classroom. Unlike the situation in the 1960s, and 1970s that the introduction noted, Chinese music teachers (in specialized and non-specialized schools) actively participate in academic conferences, organize international academic exchanges, or ask

foreign specialists to give lectures (Xiang, 2018, p.425). With the development of multimedia technologies and their application to music education courses like singing and ear training, composing, and music appreciation, many Chinese schools were among the first to offer computer music courses (Xiang, 2018). This made the students much more interested in learning and made teaching much more effective (Xiang, 2018, p. 425). The widespread use of the Internet in the 21st century has had a big effect on how education is given. Education in music is not an exception. In higher education, new classroom techniques including MOOCs, micro-classes, flipping the classroom, and online learning have emerged, revolutionizing the traditional music education classroom (Xiang, 2018, p. 425). The development of choral singing from singing and ear training is clear.

c) *Emotion*

For choral education to help students develop their emotional skills, teachers need to know what works and how to effectively prepare children for the singing exercise. One aspect of this is the "attack," represented by the use of the Bernoulli effect, which is directly related to the closure of the vocal cords, is necessary to understand how to make the vocal cords create a scientifically and medically close vibration with the breath throughout the attacking process (Vernard, 1967). Hongxing and Zhen (2019, p. 5) list relaxation, singing posture, breathing, and resonance as the four steps of the warm-up process.

In a non-specialist setting, these are the procedures that might not take place, or be delivered in an inadequate fashion. Second, choral singing techniques, diction, and multi-voice synchronization are practiced during the rehearsal phase. In contrast to the warm-up, the last relaxation technique involves letting your voice relax and slowly starting to speak again. It works by using mild sighs, contemplative eye closure, listening to the piano, slowly stretching the limbs, etc. (Hongxing and Zhen, 2019, p. 5).

The right way to sing in a choir is to avoid the sound of solo singing and focus on blending with the other singers. Additionally, the teacher should take into account the unique vocal qualities of each student, demonstrate scientific singing techniques, and coordinate the timbres of the choir members to produce a tone that is mellow and soft, a voice that is accurate and harmonious, and a sound that is well-balanced and vibrant (Tan, 2015).

d) *Choral Singing within Chinese Educational Culture*

The literature search brought up a wide range of enquiry on music teaching in China. Chinese elementary and secondary students must take 1-2 music sessions every week (Mei and Yang, 2021, parag. 3). These classes should encompass singing, playing, enjoying, reading, and sight-singing (Yu and Leung, 2019, pp. 178–179). Singing dominates classrooms, because

music is not compulsory for the gaokao, and receives less attention than English, math, and science (OECD, 2016). (Yu and Leung, 2019).

Xinhua News covered the role of choirs in education in 2022. China's new "double reduction" education plan, which attempts to make primary and middle school students' lives simpler by giving them less homework and tutoring outside of school, has focused more on leisure and athletic activities, the news station believed (Xinhua, 2022). Parents considered choir practice "a waste of time" and a distraction from academics, making it difficult to encourage their children to attend. Choir was not popular with the parents (Xinhua, 2022).

Xinhua's article focuses on non-professional music colleges, while parents whose children attend elite music specialized institutions in most major Chinese cities may have different perspectives. Xiang (2018) criticizes how China used to teach music based on the Soviet Union's model, but he praises how it now focuses on local communities.

e) *Choir Singing and communities*

Choir music is now composed in China due to this link with local communities. Liu Xiaogeng, a composer, explained why choirs and professors liked his music. "Collecting hundreds of folk songs from people" gave him an emotional connection to music and inspired his China-themed works. His choral compositions include these resources and ethnic minority practises from diverse places, establishing an emotional relationship between the singer and the music. Local languages help blend compositions into local culture. The Chinese children's choir favourite "water bugs" employs Zhuang language (Xiaogeng, 2020). Choral music that is so strongly tied to regional Chinese oral culture is becoming more significant to the people.

The Cultural Revolution's impact on music in the ensuing decades is Xiaogeng's deepest regret. He noted that the Chinese only taught choral music for around 100 years, which was interrupted by Mao. He thinks it has potential but requires technological, aesthetic, and ideological improvements (Xiaogeng, 2020). Xiaogeng wants more Chinese choral singers to sing with international choirs and develop new tunes.

A feature of cultural life in China is its connection to the politics of the party. Edward Wong (2011) connects government support for choral music to the "red culture revival" commemorating the revolution's anniversary. To commemorate Maoist classics such as "The East is Red" and "Without the Communist Party, There Would Be No New China;" party officials have directed that choirs and musical acts be formed in schools, state-owned enterprises, and neighborhood groups (Wong, 2011). Even prisons in Chongqing were hosting singalongs, and one mental hospital has started

recommending them to inmates (Wong, 2011). When there is a connection between party goals and music, funding is provided, and parents become supportive because the songs remind them of their youth.

The millennial generation of Chinese youth in the urban centers are open to modern choral music, The Shanghai-based Rainbow Chamber Singers have proven a huge hit with Chinese millennials, they are a young choir group that came from the Shanghai Music Conservatory and look to open choral music beyond the "red revival" (Griffiths, 2017). Their lyrics connect to arranged marriages, the pressures of low pay, and growing up in modern China; they describe their music as a "rallying cry" for their generation (Griffiths, 2017). The way choral music is connecting to the emotions of the millennial generation should mean that they will Choral Singing in the Schools of Rural China.

Following on from the ideas of Xiaogeng, the revitalizing of the choirs in the rural parts of China, away from the specialized music colleges, has been a feature of the last decade. This may be closely connected to the local languages and the renewed interest in Chinese folklore that Xiaogeng alluded to in Chen et al., (2023) connection of the importance of the choirs to the ongoing rural revitalization in contemporary China. Due to its distinctive art form, choral art education for children in rural areas receiving compulsory schooling has a special educational value (Chen et al., 2023, 184). Chen et al., (2023) article showed three routes for the integrated and high-quality development of children's choral art education in urban and rural areas, using the integration of children's choral art education into the process of national rural revitalization as the starting point.

Rural village schools are common in China, and there are concerns about the quality of music education provided there. This is because, although quality-oriented education is becoming a bigger aspect of basic education in China as the country's curriculum reform moves forward, in rural China, due to historical and geographical factors, the economy and culture of the countryside are very different from those of the cities, and most schools have a dearth of professional talent and a thin artistic atmosphere (Chen et al., 2023). Even if policy guidelines continue to support the growth of arts education, it is challenging to put them into practice and enforce them in relatively underdeveloped rural areas (Chen et al., 2023, pp. 185–186). The new curricular standards are challenging to implement in many rural schools, and there is a gap between the policies that have been released and how they are being put into practice.

Many schools in wealthy urban areas have their own choirs, bands, or dance groups. This is because these schools can afford to hire highly qualified music teachers, and parents can send their kids to private classes after school to learn how to play an instrument

(Sun and Leung, 2013, p. 32). In remote areas, on the other hand, it can be hard to guarantee weekly music lessons, let alone regular lessons on musical instruments, because of the stress of high-stakes tests, the cost of music education, and the lack of certified music teachers (Sun and Leung, 2013, p. 32).

Part of the problem in rural areas is that parents do not respect this part of the curriculum. This can be because of cultural barriers that show up in the way parents act. This is especially true in rural areas, where teachers and parents do not help children develop aesthetic ideas in elementary and middle school (Chen et al., 2023, p. 185). Aesthetic education is not used as much in homeschooling because most parents have the wrong ideas about the arts and have strong beliefs about them. There are a lot of these kinds of biases in China, especially in rural areas (Chen et al., 2023, p. 185). Teaching children about the arts is perceived by many parents as a waste of time and money because schools and parents want their children to leave education with good academic grades. They do not even fully comprehend the value of aesthetic education, let alone understand it (Chen et al., 2023, p. 185).

VIII. CONCLUSION

From the initial research questions and the literature searches some results can be derived that lead to suggestions made toward the questions.

(1) *To what extent does a rural location impact the teaching and quality of choral singing in Chinese colleges?*

In education, it has been thought that choral singing is much further along in cities than in rural areas. This is because the parents in the rural area lack an appreciation for the value of the arts, they are reluctant to have children attend extra out-of-school classes for arts based subjects, where academic success is the principal driver.

(2) *How important for students valuing singing at college level is their participation in schools?*

It is essential. College education cannot succeed without preparation in the early years. The quality of music educators, parental support, and regional economic growth have been shown to all play a significant role in determining the nature and scope of choral music education in China's public schools.

(3) *Do schools adequately prepare students for college music and choral delivery?*

It is very dependent upon location, parental support and the training of teachers.

(4) *Are teachers adequately trained for teaching choral skills in non-specialized Chinese educational colleges?*

It would appear not. Over use on textbooks due to a lack of teacher expertise is one such pointer.

(5) *Is it possible to assess the emotional quality of choral education?*

This is a variable that is difficult to quantify and, possibly, complicated the research searches.

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