

How popular music pedagogy is integrated in the diverse environment of international school education in China: A case study in Shanghai

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Abstract

In Western countries, music educators have made efforts to revitalise enthusiasm for music education by integrating more mainstream and culturally-relevant genres into their curriculum. Conversely, current research indicates that popular music pedagogy in mainland China is not encouraged and faces many obstacles, as school music education is used to promote Chinese traditional music and bolster nationalism. This qualitative case study investigates how popular music pedagogy in an international school, based in China, accommodates the diverse cultural backgrounds of its Chinese and non-Chinese students when teaching Western and Chinese popular music. For 6 weeks, I had the privilege of closely observing a music class containing a mixture of 12 Chinese and non-Chinese students at an international secondary school based in Shanghai, China. Findings revealed that students were given autonomy to engage with their preferred music genre during lessons that focused on music performance and composition. Interestingly, Chinese students gravitated towards studying C-pop on their own accord, a domestic and sanitised form of popular music. However, the study of modern popular music genres was not prevalent during the music appraisal lessons. The challenges of integrating Chinese popular music pedagogy in an international classroom setting are also discussed.

Keywords

c-pop, China, Chinese traditional music, informal learning, music education, popular music

Introduction

In the Western world, the academic study of music at secondary school and university level had been stigmatised as an unpopular subject due to its notoriously low uptake amongst students

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(Lamont & Maton, 2008, 2010; Ng & Hartwig, 2011). Researchers within the field of music education tackled this issue and found that one of the primary factors that contributed towards music's low uptake was that the taught content was antiquated and out of touch with current students' musical interests (Kratus, 2007; Wright, 2002). For years, academic music maintained a reputation as an esoteric subject that gave preferential treatment to the study of old, Western art music composed by European composers (Gould, 2009; Griffiths, 2020). Nowadays, recent research shows that examination bodies and music teachers are tackling this issue by embracing the study of more contemporary music genres, most notably 21st-century popular music (Christophersen & Gullberg, 2016). Discourse surrounding a desire for music curriculum content to be more inclusive and egalitarian also continues to take place within the field of Western music education (Kivijarvi & Vakeva, 2020; Rambarran, 2018).

Music teachers based in international schools in China face an interesting challenge that arises from this increasing trend of musical inclusion that continues to manifest within music education. Given the diverse cultural backgrounds that international students come from, how, if at all, do these educators attempt to accommodate all their student's respective musical interests and cultures into their curriculum effectively?

This challenge is particularly interesting because of the precarious nature of Chinese popular music pedagogy within formal Chinese music education. Despite its domestic popularity amongst the youth, Chinese pop (C-pop) as an area of study in school music education is not commonplace, with a heavy emphasis on teaching traditional or patriotic Chinese music to preserve Chinese culture and nationalism (Ho, 2018c; Law & Ho, 2011). Consequently, C-pop is currently not well recognised, internationally or nationally, as a formal area of music study, with the depth of literature and resources pertaining to the study of C-pop in China lacking in comparison to the abundance of Western popular music pedagogy literature that is available (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2010).

In addition to the task of accommodating different styles of Western popular music into their curriculum, how are international music teachers based in China able to cater to the interests of their Chinese students by successfully integrating the study of Chinese music within an international classroom setting?

Purposes of the study

For 6 weeks in autumn of 2020, I received permission to attend and closely observe an eighth-grade music class taught by the school's music teacher, named Mr. Wilson, at a British international school in Shanghai, China. Throughout these observations, my objective was to observe if popular music pedagogy was included within his class's appraisal, performance and composition components. The purpose of this case study was to discover whether Mr. Wilson's lessons had accommodated the study of different 21st-century popular music genres that were pertinent to the students' interests and, if so, identify how it was implemented and examine the successes and challenges from doing so.

During classes that focussed on composition, I examined what genres were allowed to be composed and whether musical/creative boundaries were enforced, inhibiting students from expressing their musical interests. During classes that focussed on performance, I noted the genres that students were performing and identified whether students were receptive to the music they were performing. During classes that focussed on the theoretical study of music, I identified the music styles taught, whether Mr. Wilson's curriculum included studying 21st-century popular music genres and if students were receptive to the music.

Literature review

Popular music education in the West

In music education, prominent literature that examines the state of music education does so from a Western perspective and within a Western geographical context. In the UK, researchers have carried out studies that substantiate music education's historical unpopularity and low uptake amongst students. In 2017, figures published by the Joint Council of Qualifications showed a 10% decline in the uptake of A-level music (ISM, 2018). This negative trend continued in 2019, with uptake in A-level music seeing a 30.2% decline since 2014 (ISM, 2019). Within the UK, reasons that contributed towards music's historic and current low uptake in schools have been explored by musicologists. One of the primary reasons found was that 'school music' was perceived as boring and did not cater to students' musical interests. 'School music' has been known to largely consist of Western art music, such as classical music, and has been suggested by musicologists as the leading cause for persuading only 5% to 10% of students to continue studying music through secondary school (Humberstone, 2017). In response to this, music researchers have viewed the further inclusion of relevant popular music genres as an important solution towards making music more appealing to students and ultimately increasing music uptake (Charanga, 2021).

This paper focusses on the teaching of popular music due to the increasing amount of literature that suggests the study of popular music genres can not only fulfil the interests of students, but also offer educational value too. Being able to simultaneously elevate students' musicality while aligning with their preferred musical interests is an important solution towards keeping music education engaging and culturally relevant. For example, Halick's (2016) article discusses the educational benefits of studying Electronic Dance Music (EDM). Halick suggests that this style of popular music can help students consolidate their memorisation and dictation abilities due to its repetitive rhythmic nature. MacCuthcheon et al.'s (2016) study on the educational value of Djing within music education discovered that participants learned valuable musical skills, such as knowledge of musical structure and performance skills, while being able to engage with a contemporary music genre.

Existing research also suggests that teaching popular music can help cultivate a favourable classroom environment for students to feel comfortable learning music. Rauduvaite's (2018) study found that students were receptive to the study of popular music. The students found that studying popular music had evoked positive emotions, which enabled them to express their emotions more openly. This study highlighted the importance of creating a comfortable learning environment in which students could convey their musicality uninhibited and without fear of feeling ostracised.

Popular music education in China

In contrast to Western countries, advancements in popular music pedagogy, including C-pop, within school music curriculums in China is not viewed as a pressing issue, and thus continues to be overlooked within the country, despite C-pop's popularity amongst Chinese youths. Law and Ho's (2015) study gauged the sentiment of popular music and its consumption level among students in Shanghai. Their findings revealed that students regularly listened to Chinese and Non-Chinese popular music. Students expressed a demand to see the study of popular music included more within their school music curriculum.

Similarly, Ho's (2014) study of music education in Beijing investigated the level of emphasis and type of popular music students were learning at school, in light of the 2011 music curriculum reform. Findings from the study revealed that domestic music styles, such as Chinese folk,

traditional Chinese orchestral music and Chinese popular music, were more commonplace in the classroom. In contrast, Western popular music was deeply unrepresented in the classroom, despite the students' strong desire to learn about popular music from foreign countries, particularly the UK and the USA (Law & Ho 2014).

While these studies indicate a desire from Chinese students for music education in China to be more inclusive and integrate popular music within the curriculum, this is ultimately hindered by the government's prioritisation towards national and traditional Chinese music. It has been noted that promoting nationalistic and traditional Chinese music within music education is done so purposefully to limit the Western influence and enforce nationalism, patriotism and collectivism within the country (Law & Ho, 2011; Ho & Law, 2012).

As a result, C-pop's lack of recognition as an area of study within the Chinese curriculum has negative implications towards music educators who may be interested in wanting to learn about the genre, but would find doing so challenging due to the lack of official resources available. This is especially true for international music teachers based in China looking to provide their Chinese students an outlet to study C-pop within a classroom setting, but would not be able to teach the genre authentically without a prior in-depth understanding of it.

Methodology

A qualitative, instrumental case study design was chosen for this study. Conducting a case study would provide insight as to how popular music was being taught within an international classroom setting. The participants and setting of this study were chosen after being granted permission by the headmaster and the music teacher, Mr. Wilson, to enter the school and observe his classes. The school chosen in the study was a British international school that taught its students under a British education system, in which students would eventually receive GCSE and A-level qualifications. The school predominantly consisted of mainland Chinese students, as well as students from European, North American and East Asian countries. This mixture of demographics was an important, as the purpose of the study was to observe the extent in which the students' diverse backgrounds and musical interests were at all considered in the construction of the school's music curriculum. Because Mr. Wilson was the head of music as well as the only music teacher within the school, he was ultimately responsible for the styles of music that students in the school were able to study and engage with.

The themes explored in this paper emerged from observations of Mr. Wilson's teaching, lesson content and the learning behaviours of his students and interviews from the teacher and a selection of students.

Participant and setting

During the time of data collection, Mr. Wilson had been teaching music, as well as English Literature and art, at the international school for more than 5 years. He taught these subjects to all the lower, middle and high school students. Mr. Wilson was a self-professed classically trained musician, holding a Bachelor's degree in music.

The students in his classes comprised a mixture of Chinese and non-Chinese students. In Mr. Wilson's eighth-grade class, seven students were from mainland China, and five students were non-Chinese students that came from various backgrounds. Two of the students were Korean, one student was British, one student was American and one student was French. Mr. Wilson taught the class in English. I had chosen to observe Mr. Wilson's eighth-grade class for the following reasons: Mr. Wilson's GCSE music class consisted of only three students, and his A-level class contained

only one student. This was not a big enough sample size to discover whether Mr. Wilson would accommodate a variety of musical interests of his students. Furthermore, Mr. Wilson did not have to follow a specification when teaching his eighth-grade class, and the students were at an age where they had developed their own musical interests and personality. Because all of the lesson plans were devised by himself, Mr. Wilson had full autonomy in deciding what genres of music the students would study.

Data collection

The following observations were carried out in an eighth-grade class that Mr. Wilson had taught from November 3 to December 17. He would meet with his class (comprising 12 students) twice a week, with each class lasting 50 minutes. Two observations were cancelled due to increased restrictions of entry from non-members of staff as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in a total of 12 class observations, according to Mr. Wilson's timetable.

Performance, composition and appraisal components were rotated into separate classes, with each class focussing on one of the components.

In this study, the observation of each class was the primary data collection procedure. Throughout each class's duration, notes were transcribed using my laptop on a separate word document for each class. Points of interest from the teacher, students and lesson content were immediately transcribed. To minimise being obtrusive, I had sat at the back of the class and had not interfered with Mr. Wilson's teaching. However, students were naturally curious about my presence and would occasionally look back at me after Mr. Wilson had informed the students what I would be doing in the classes.

I was permitted to interview both the teacher and his students during intervals in which there was a lull – for example, periods within the lesson where students were informed to concentrate on their tasks. I asked Mr. Wilson questions about his teaching methods, lesson content, his personal music expertise and the students' sentiment towards learning music in his classes. I had also briefly interviewed his students, and asked them their thoughts of the lesson content and impressions of the music being learned. Interviewing the students and teacher were equally essential to the case study, as getting the responses from the participants would either confirm or deny my initial interpretations and observations of the students' behaviours and perceived reactions to the music lessons. All of the responses were transcribed on my laptop.

Data analysis

Upon completing the observations, I revisited all transcripts and looked for themes that recurred within the data. These themes were transcribed in the form of codes, which were coloured and annotated on each transcription. While common theme appearances were noted down, I also looked for unusual points of interest that had stood out in the study. Themes were then organised in a list alongside quotes and transcripts that substantiated each theme. Afterwards, transcriptions and data analysis were sent to Mr. Wilson for checks that the students and teacher were accurately portrayed, and he was permitted to add or revise the transcripts.

Research ethics

Research ethics were maintained throughout the study. I had informed Mr. Wilson that his school's identity, the students and himself would be strictly confidential and not released to the public. Consequently, both the teacher and his students have been given pseudonyms in this paper to maintain anonymity. The teacher and students were briefed that data collected would only be used for

this study, and students were permitted not to take part in interviews if they felt uncomfortable to do so. Mr. Wilson was also given the option of discontinuing the study at any time.

Results

Theme 1: Uninhibited musical expression through performance and composition

For the performance aspect of his class, Mr. Wilson had already tasked the students to split up into groups and practice playing a song of their choosing. The groups were then allocated to separate practice rooms where the students could practice their songs. As to whether Mr. Wilson had enforced any restrictions on song choice, he explained:

‘All the songs have to be approved by me first, but for the most part, I encourage [the students] to choose any song that makes use of all their musical abilities, and most importantly that they would enjoy playing’.

Mr. Wilson had informed me of the songs that each group would be rehearsing. There were two groups, however, that were of particular interest. One group, consisting of one Korean and two Chinese students, were rehearsing a song called ‘Dynamite’ by BTS, a famous South Korean boy band. Each group member was assigned a role, utilising an electric keyboard, a Launchpad MIDI controller and vocals. Another group, made up of four Chinese students, had chosen the song ‘You Exist in My Song’ by Wanting Qu, a famous Chinese pop musician. The group used a piano, violin, electric drum kit and vocals to create their personalised rendition of the song. When asked why they had chosen their song, both groups answered that they ‘liked hearing and singing’ to the song. One of the Chinese students exclaimed:

‘Everyone knows the song, it’s so popular in China!’

Mr. Wilson also echoed a similar sentiment:

‘K-pop and C-pop are very popular in China, especially with teenagers. It’s a big part of their music consumption, so I give them a choice to experiment and have fun during these sessions with songs they listen to’.

It was evident that Mr. Wilson had successfully integrated and encouraged the learning of mainstream 21st century popular music genres during the performance classes. Three out of the four groups had chosen to perform their favourite pop songs, from C-pop to K-pop and Western pop music. While Mr. Wilson was noticeably more reserved with his degree of interference into the students’ rehearsals, he was still able to offer important feedback to help improve the quality of the performances by identifying key factors such as note accuracy, tempo and performance skills. Embracing the students’ musical interests proved to be an effective strategy as the students did not require constant supervision or instructions. Mr. Wilson would complement the group’s enthusiastic output, helping cultivate an enjoyable learning environment for the students.

As part of their composition assessment, Mr. Wilson had tasked his students to continue composing and finalising their 1 to 2 minute composition that expressed the following theme ‘feeling excited’. The students were not restricted to a specific music style or set of instrumentation, and they were encouraged to compose creatively as long as their composition matched the theme. At the start of each composition lesson, the students would immediately situate themselves in front of a computer that they would be using to compose their song and open up the software ‘Logic Pro’. This Digital Audio Workstation programme enabled students to work with limitless virtual

instruments and input their ideas using an electric keyboard connected to the computer. Mr. Wilson explained the decision to use Logic Pro:

'I think it's important to introduce new and exciting ways to produce music. Nowadays, technology plays an important role in music, so students should learn how to use it. Plus, it's really fun to play around with'.

Throughout these classes, I observed each student work on their piece, listen to their work-in-progress and ask them brief questions about their work. Surprisingly, the production of popular music was a common theme amongst the students. However, the timbres and styles varied greatly as styles ranged from hip hop, electronic dance music and rock music. Two Chinese male students, in particular, Eric and Jordan, caught my attention. They were the most audible students and frequently talked in what appeared to be providing feedback and ideas to each other. Both Eric and Jordan were producing Chinese hip hop. I had asked them their reasoning for composing hip hop, Eric, a Chinese student, answered:

'The Higher Brothers got me into hip hop. They're the biggest Chinese hip hop group, and there's a show called The Rap of China – have you heard of it? It's really popular in China. Chinese rap is getting big'.

Eric had informed me that 'The Higher Brothers' were a popular hip hop group from Chengdu, China, and that he regularly watched 'The Rap of China', a famous rap competition show documenting aspiring Chinese rappers competing against each other. Eric had answered that both had helped spread hip hop into Chinese mainstream popular culture.

It became increasingly apparent that Mr. Wilson had similarly used the composition lessons as another opportunity for the students to embrace their musical interests and compose a piece of music in the style of their preferred genre. Throughout the composition lessons, Mr. Wilson seemed distant from the students and would interject to offer his assistance if they raised their hand for help. Despite this, the feedback that Mr. Wilson would provide to his students were applicable to all the different styles of music that were being produced, such as whether their projects lacked cohesion, texture or a catchy melody and bassline.

Theme 2: Challenges towards achieving musical inclusivity

During the classes dedicated to appraising music, I was pleasantly surprised to find that Mr. Wilson had introduced to his students a diverse selection of music genres and styles from different historical periods, including popular music from the 21st century. In one lesson, Mr. Wilson had chosen American jazz music to be the focal point of discussion and study. He had started the lesson by having the students listen and watch a compilation of jazz performances playing various jazz styles, from blues to bebop. The students conveyed a mixture of reactions during this activity. There were students giggling at the sheer absurdity that was transpiring in front of their eyes, as the bebop trumpeter executed his trumpet solo in incredibly fast and colourful fashion.

Afterwards, Mr. Wilson proceeded to ask the class whether they had heard or were familiar with jazz music. Surprisingly, only two students raised their hands. Once students were tasked to complete their worksheets, I had briefly interviewed several students and asked whether they liked the music they had just been learning. One male Chinese student, Ben, said:

'The music's so crazy and weird. I've never heard this type of music before, but I think it's kind of cool, and it looks fun'.

A female British student, Rachael, was not as complementary to the music:

‘I don’t really like it. It looks really old and doesn’t sound very happy, and I don’t listen to this type of music’.

In contrast, Mr. Wilson had constructed a lesson that analysed the musical elements of famous movie soundtracks, specifically the orchestral piece ‘Binary Sunset’ by John Williams, which serves as the leading theme song in the Star Wars franchise. When comparing the two lessons, it was very noticeable that the students were more engaged when listening and discussing the Star Wars theme than jazz music. Responses were given by some students further substantiated this. Frank, an American student, expressed the following:

‘I love watching Star Wars, so it was cool that we got to learn about the theme song today’.

After the lesson, I asked Mr. Wilson his reasonings for choosing certain music styles in his lesson plans and whether he had considered including the analytical study of 21st-century popular music genres into his curriculum. He replied:

‘Trying to integrate popular music into music appraisal poses several challenges. Firstly, I am not familiar with songs that [the students] currently listen to. Also, the music would have to be appropriate for them. I don’t think analysing pop songs would be of significant value, and I let them experiment with popular music in the other lessons. For these lessons, I try to include music that is either interesting or different’.

In contrast to the performance and composition-focussed classes, Mr. Wilson was not able to accommodate the analytical study of all the students’ musical interests. Each lesson was 50 minutes long, and so time constraints meant that Mr. Wilson had to prioritise the study of certain genres that he believed would benefit all the students and pique their interest. The piece ‘Binary Sunset’ was familiar to both the students and Mr. Wilson himself, who was able to analyse the piece proficiently.

Theme 3: Sticking to convention

It was noticeable that Western art music and its traditions remained an important structural foundation within the appraisal and performance lessons. Throughout the course, Mr. Wilson had been teaching his students the works of Beethoven, Mozart and Chopin. Melodies were transcribed on the board via music notation for the students to read. Mr. Wilson would teach his students the significance of certain musical elements and ingrain traditional music terminology commonly used in classical music analysis into the students, such as ‘diatonic’ and ‘chromatic’ harmonies.

Upon finishing his lecture, the students were tasked to write a short paragraph describing each piece and the musical elements they had heard using the correct music terminology. While the study of Western art music has been criticised in the West for demotivating students (Anttila, 2010), most students appeared visibly engaged and interested in the study of Western art music. I had managed to ask each of the students whether they enjoyed studying classical music. Jim, a male Chinese student, replied:

‘Before, I used to not like studying classical music because I thought it was quite boring. Now I’m more interested in it, probably because I practice a lot of classical music at home on the piano and violin’.

The majority of Mr. Wilson’s Chinese students revealed proficiency in playing at least one classical instrument, such as the piano and violin. They were encouraged by their parents to practice classical music repertoire in their free time. Mr. Wilson had informed me that:

'Many students have been pushed by their parents to learn an instrument from a young age. There is a very competitive nature amongst Chinese parents to have their child succeed and be the best'.

I had not witnessed the analytical study of traditional Chinese music or C-pop during my observations. I asked Mr. Wilson whether he had previously taught, or would teach Chinese music in the future. He replied:

'I've tried to teach Chinese music in the past, but it was a challenge for me, given that I'm a classically trained musician. My expertise is in Western music genres, so I teach the students music that I am familiar with. The parents love that I'm teaching classical music to [the students] because it is very popular. It's still an important part of music education and has a rich history that shouldn't be forgotten'.

After the observations had concluded, I had asked Mr. Wilson to further comment on whether the student's parents had any significant influence towards the construction of his music lessons, and whether the parents had a musical preference for their child to study a particular style of music. Mr. Wilson said the following:

'At the end of the day, I'm the only person that decides what the students should learn during my lessons. That being said, I do get a strong sense that the Chinese parents, in particular, prefer me teaching classical music, because that's what their child practices at home. I do sense a perception from them that playing popular music is more for fun and not taken seriously'.

Discussion

Mr. Wilson had accommodated the students' diverse musical interests during the performance and composition lessons, which had noticeable advantages and disadvantages. During these lessons, it appeared significantly easier for Mr. Wilson to give his students independence and autonomy to explore music genres that were culturally relevant to their lives. Music researchers have stressed the importance of accommodating students' diverse backgrounds by introducing diverse music (Kallio, 2015; Woodford, 2012). Due to this, many of the students took this opportunity to either compose or perform popular music, such as C-pop. This reinforces the notion that integrating popular music into music education can foster an educational experience that is engaging and relevant to the student (Vasil, 2015).

A subset of Chinese students gravitated towards engaging with popular music from Chinese or East Asian artists. Many Chinese students had chosen to either perform or compose in the style of their favourite C-pop artist. C-pop is a popular music style that blends Western-style instrumentals and song structure with Chinese lyrics and melodies. Western popular music's influence upon the global musical world has inevitably seen an influx of avid Chinese popular music listeners and musicians. In particular, hip hop has continued to grow in popularity but has simultaneously experienced a tumultuous relationship with the government due to a clash of cultures between individualism and collectivism (Ho, 2018c). Hip hop culture has been known to use explicit language and has been censored in several instances within the Chinese public sphere (Amar, 2018). Currently, popular music remains prevalent within Chinese mainstream culture but must pass through censorship, localisation and sanitisation to be deemed appropriate for its listeners (Luo & Ming, 2020; Zou, 2019). Nonetheless, the Chinese students in Mr. Wilson's class were proud of the fact that the music had come from musicians of Chinese descent.

Mr. Wilson had integrated popular music learning into his curriculum, but to a certain extent. During the performance and composition lessons, Mr. Wilson gave his students musical autonomy, and could offer musical critiques of their musical expressivity based on a universal

criterion. However, Mr. Wilson had only a basic and limited understanding of genres such as C-pop and K-pop. Two out of the four groups in his class had vocals that were sung in Chinese and Korean, which he could not understand, and so he could not comment in-depth about the unique timbres and characteristics that each genre exhibits through the vocals and instrumentation. The ability to teach a variety of current popular music genres with profundity and authenticity was a challenging task for Mr. Wilson, and this was especially true during the appraisal lessons, as analytical discussions of these genres were virtually non-existent. Admittedly, Mr. Wilson was not qualified, nor had the musical knowledge, to teach these genres as areas of study. Researchers within the field of equity in music education have called for music educators to make an effort in catering their curriculums towards music that shapes the world in which we live in (Allsup & Shieh, 2012; Hess, 2017). However, due to lack of resources available concerning C-pop pedagogy, Mr. Wilson prioritised the teaching of contemporary music, such as the piece 'Binary Sunset'. Because of its association with the popular franchise Star Wars, the piece was less likely to ostracise students and would be recognisable to both his Chinese and non-Chinese students.

Interestingly, students appeared generally not opposed to the study of Western art music during their lessons. The majority of Mr. Wilson's students had visibly displayed an eagerness to work hard when it came to improving their playing ability and consolidating their musical knowledge. This ostensible interest and demand from students to study Western art music in schools, alongside popular music, is a stark contrast to Western cultures where the former has historically hindered the popularity of music education. In the last two decades, China has continued exporting classical musicians (Yang, 2007). This global success continues to spur more than 38 million Chinese children to learn to play the piano and other classical instruments (Melvin & Cai, 2004). This was demonstrated by the fact that all of Mr. Wilson's students were adept at playing at least one musical instrument. While students welcomed popular music, it was also important for them, and their parents, to improve upon their classical music expertise.

Conclusion

In international school settings, it is important to not ostracise students and embrace their respective musical cultures within the classroom environment as much as possible. Mr. Wilson had achieved this to an extent during the lessons that focussed on performance and composition, but he could not go into more depth in terms of understanding the lyricism or performance style associated with some of the genres. Accommodating a blend of musical cultures within lessons is even more difficult during music appraisal classes if the teacher does not have a proficient understanding of the music beforehand. Teaching C-pop authentically to Chinese and non-Chinese students would require a deep understanding of the genre, which could be expedited with the assistance of C-pop pedagogical resources and literature. However, given the fact that the genre is not embraced or recognised domestically within the Chinese school curriculum (Ho, 2018c), this remains a challenging task for international music teachers in China.

In addition, teachers must also carefully balance the amount of popular music that is taught over the teaching of traditional Western art music, as observations from the study revealed that classical training was prioritised and perceived as beneficial to a huge proportion of the Chinese students and their parents.

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Declaration of interest

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