

THE ANTIQUITY OF JAZZ IN CHINA: THE TRANSFORMATION OF YELLOW MUSIC INTO A JAZZ RESURGENCE.

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**ABSTRACT**

Yellow music evolved from Jazz, which had been brought to Shanghai in the early 20th century, but had been modified into hybrid forms that combined Western rhythms with Chinese melodies and cultural aspects. Moral censure, state repression, and gendered social restriction influenced both how the genre was recollected and how the public perceived it, even though it was a representative of world modernity. This research synthesised historical, social, pedagogical, and ethnomusicological perspectives to shed light on similarities and differences in the discipline. Studies reveal that official pedagogical methods, cross-cultural membership, and pedagogical initiatives have all worked towards the revival of Jazz, yet social and political contexts have always served as an intermediary when it came to individuals' capacity to listen and embrace the music. This synthesis illuminates the transformation of Jazz from its origins in yellow music to contemporary Jazz practice by presenting the antiquity of Jazz as a site of cultural nostalgia, historical recall, and artistic possibility. A historically mediated process expressing the dynamic of history, social convention, and artistic creativity, this essay contends that the revival of Jazz in China is more than a musical phenomenon. The article offers a rich perspective of the interrelationship between historical and current musical identities by connecting historical repression and current reinterpretation to position yellow music as the foundation and driving force behind China's renaissance of Jazz.

**Keywords:** Yellow music, Jazz music, Jazz revival, Chinese music, China.

**INTRODUCTION**

When Jazz made its way to China in the early 1900s, it gave rise to yellow music, a fusion style that blended Western rhythms with traditional Chinese melodies and rhythms. Jazz, despite its enduring appeal, has experienced periods of marginalisation and suppression. However, current trends indicate a revival of the genre, propelled by renewed interest, cultural awareness, and creative interpretation. Western musical genre Jazz was envisioned in Shanghai during early 20th-century China. The research focuses on Shanghai as a site of intersection between Chinese and foreign influences and emphasizes "Sinicization" (the local adaptation of jazz) (Chaichana, 2024). Wang (2022) followed the development of Jazz education in mainland China and examined how schools and musicians have coped with the foreign origins of the genre. As noted by Wang (2022), Chinese Jazz education is moulded by the cultural policy of the nation

and also by globalisation. Shanghai music of old, which ran from the 1920s to the 1940s and combined Chinese folk with Western popular and Jazz music, was researched by Yuan and Chareawrum (2024) for its historical and cultural values. This composition contributed to Chinese cultural identity in the long term and served as an inspiration for subsequent Jazz renaissances (Yuan & Chareawrum, 2024). While making sociological observations on Chinese music, Zhang (2021) found issues such as the blending of Western forms such as Jazz with domestic practice and political spaces worthy of consideration. Aside from serving as entertainment, music is, according to the study, an expression of power relations, cultural identity, and societal transformation (Zhang, 2021).

Yuhan (2024) tackled the difficulties in the career of female Jazz singers in China and explained how gender stereotypes, institutional discrimination, and historical concepts about jazz have influenced prospects at present. Jazz is a musical and social phenomena that reflects broader patterns of inequality (Yuhan, 2024). Using "Spring is Back" as an example, Euprasert (2025) studied the ways in which cultural elements blend into contemporary Chinese Jazz compositions. As evidence of creative exploration and cultural interaction, the article cites the fusion of Western Jazz styles with ancient Chinese musical motifs (Euprasert, 2025). Nathaus and Nott examined in their 2022 study the development and cultural meaning of Shanghai's Chinese taxi-dancers during the interwar period. The women's ability to manage multifaceted social relations as they constructed a new type of entertainment by combining Western dance with Chinese cultural practices (Nathaus & Nott, 2022).

Peng & Kaosawang (2023) examined how popular music in China developed and how it was brought into traditional schooling. Both popular music creation and teaching models have been influenced by globalisation and local cultural shifts, as the research indicates (Peng & Kaosawang, 2023). Focusing on the transnational Chinese context, Tan (2021) researched how ethnomusicology can be decolonised. Bringing into focus global-local tensions in music scholarship, the work questions the validity of musical accounts through challenging the influence of privilege, power, and cultural hierarchies (Tan, 2021). Performance, collaboration, and political and moral struggles that musicians in occupied Japanese-controlled Beijing. The research pointed out that music played a double role as a cultural expression and a negotiating ground during the occupation (Schröder, 2022).

### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Chaichana (2024) research, Jazz initially entered Shanghai in the 1920s through colonial clubs with foreign performers. Its quick integration into native culture spawned Li Jinhui's yellow music, combining Jazz with Chinese elements. Following 1949, when communist ideology labelled Jazz as bourgeois culture, it was condemned as decadent, even though it had previously been greeted in its early days as new and fashionable. Following the 1978 reforms, Jazz experienced a renaissance and became a central part of Shanghai's cultural heritage and global image once more (Chaichana, 2024). Jazz has been regarded as a Western bourgeois

taste and excluded from China since 1949. The revival of Jazz in China's educational and cultural environments took place in the 1980s due to the more open policies of the nation. Jazz studies were becoming increasingly prevalent in colleges and conservatories, though there was generally tension between Western theory and indigenous practice. From an immoral political tool to an instrument of cultural modernisation, the above shows the way Jazz developed (Wang, 2022). Due to urban modernisation, Yuan & Chareawrum (2024) added, traditional music of Shanghai developed, combining Western influences with native creative traditions. Pioneers of the yellow music, which combined Jazz tempos with traditional Chinese melodies, were Li Jinhui. This hybrid form was talked about and experienced by successive generations after it had been banned in 1949 because of political powers' denunciation of it as decadent. It is argued by Yuan and Chareawrum (2024) that the city of Shanghai emerged as a hub for cross-cultural experimentation because of its entertainment industry and cosmopolitan nightlife (Yuan & Chareawrum, 2024).

To illustrate how political ideologies have shaped cultural creation, Zhang (2021) traced the development of Chinese music over various regimes. Jazz, Chinese folk music, and urban sounds all blended in Shanghai in the early part of the 1900s, turning the city into a mecca for hybrid music. Art forms such as Jazz have been marginalized after 1949 because music has been regulated as an instrument of communist ideology. Jazz was framed as modern and international owing to global cultural exchanges that took place during China's reform and opening (Zhang, 2021). Yuhan (2024) mapped the history of Jazz in China, starting from its early life in Shanghai to its modern renaissance. Jazz initially identified with city entertainment and high-end nightlife but eventually symbolized international modernity. In this space, women singers tended to have to walk the tightrope, reconciling artistic aspirations with social norms. Institutional obstacles still restricted entry into performance venues, education, and professional connections even after the 1978 revival (Yuhan, 2024). In examining China's current cultural hybridisation, Euprasert (2025) placed contemporary Jazz in this context. Since the advent of the reform period in 1978, musicians and artists in China started creating new music that attracted listeners from across the globe by combining Jazz with indigenous Chinese musical genres. Not only is this blending a demonstration of musical creativity, but it also mirrors wider social and cultural movements in modern China (Euprasert, 2025).

The cosmopolitan culture of Shanghai during the early 20th century made it possible for Western-style social dances to be brought in, as suggested by Nathaus & Nott (2022). The idea of taxi-dancing, in which customers would buy dance tickets and dance with hostesses, was picked up due to Western customs. The late 1920s experienced a sudden rise in the number of Chinese women employed as *wunü*, or dancing girls, as a result of shifting gender roles and cultural conventions in China's urban centres (Nathaus & Nott, 2022). Western musical genres, particularly Jazz, rock, and pop, have influenced China's popular music for long. Under the reform movement of the 1980s, these genres—previously viewed with suspicion under communist ideology—gained popularity. Here, popular music is rightfully being studied in schools and conservatories in addition to traditional Chinese music (Peng & Kaosawang, 2023).

Tan (2021) research was set within the context of continued debates on cultural representation and authority. Dubious authenticities hybrid musical styles arose from China's adaptation and adoption of Western musical forms such as Jazz. In discourses on decolonisation, the article observed that non-Western actors, including Chinese intellectuals and musicians, tend to be marginalised (Tan, 2021). Schröder (2022) states that the musicians of Beijing were under strict propaganda and censorship controls between 1937 and 1945. Genres such as Jazz and Western swing were both politically engaged and progressive. Musicians had to work around handling occupying soldiers while also concentrating on their musical output and image (Schröder, 2022).

### THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to analyse the shift from yellow music to contemporary Jazz in China, highlighting the mediating role of the longevity of Jazz. The overall aim of the study is to find out how Jazz developed from earlier forms of music and how the revival of music was influenced by educational, social, and historical aspects. Gender roles, political movements, and educational practices are some of the social and institutional factors that this study seek to analyse. This study also considered how the "oldness" of jazz—its historical associations of nostalgia, repression, and cultural memory—functions as a source for current creativity and rethinking. The research aim to offer a complete and contextualised account of China's resurgence of jazz, emphasizing the manner in which creativity, cultural transformation, and past legacies all coalesce in informing the current evolution of this unique musical form.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Drawing upon Nicholson's concept of globalisation through the example of Whitey Smith's "I Didn't Make a Million" and Buck Clayton's Jazz World, Chaichana (2024) illustrates the application of this idea in the work. Reflecting cycles of cultural acceptance and repression, the works describe the import and adaptation of jazz within Shanghai's particular social and political context (Chaichana, 2024). Global Jazz pedagogy, cultural hybridity, and music education transformation in China are the themes of Wang's (2022) critical review of literature. Although Western-based Jazz programs focus on improvisation and creativity, their Chinese equivalents tend to blend these aspects with more structured methods based on conservatory pedagogy (Wang, 2022). The research of Yuan and Chareawrum (2024) includes academic assessments of cultural hybridity, popular music scholarship, and the influence of Shanghai upon global cultural exchange. Old Shanghai music was an expression of greater societal changes such as urbanisation, evolving gender roles within performance, and changing national identity, in addition to influencing musical taste (Yuan & Chareawrum, 2024).

Jazz has long been identified with Shanghai's cosmopolitan elite, and this concert illustrated how musical tastes mirror socioeconomic status and cultural affluence. It also discussed how communist China employed music for political purposes while repressing nonconformist styles

such as Jazz. Yellow music and modern Jazz-fusion are two instances of the hybrid forms which arise when Western and Chinese musical traditions intersect. Today's revitalisation of Shanghai's Jazz past has its foundation in the rich history of Jazz in the city, and this body of literature has also emphasized the power of nostalgia for reviving timeless musical tastes. This piece integrates different perspectives to situate jazz within the context, demonstrating how it is interconnected with urbanization, politics, and evolving cultural norms in China, and not as an independent genre (Zhang, 2021). By highlighting its Western origin, transplantation to Chinese music, and subsequent revival, Yuhan (2024) explored the history and cultural background of Chinese Jazz. There is limited research on Chinese female Jazz singers, even though gender and music studies emphasise systemic inequities. Drawing on Jazz history, performance studies, and music gender, this article showed how women musicians respond to conflicting pressures to be faithful to their music, fit into social norms, and perform in commercialized environments. It employed Western Jazz scholarship as a comparative and remarks that while women across the world have faced similar structural problems, the Chinese context posits additional layers of cultural, institutional, and political considerations. Drawing on these viewpoints, the literature review identified how gendered experience influences the perception and listening to Jazz in China, and how institutional culture, cultural mind-set, and historical stigmatisation all contribute to the resurgence of the genre (Yuhan, 2024). There have been very few studies on contemporary cross-cultural jazz writing, but Euprasert (2025) chronicled the introduction of Jazz to China, its transformation into yellow music, its suppression, and then its return to popularity. The application of Western techniques of improvisation on Chinese tonalities and instruments by composers was analysed through ethnomusicology, musicology, and cultural hybridity theory. Historical evidence indicates that this type of convergence performs a range of functions, such as cultural memory preservation, creative stimulation, and internationalisation of Chinese Jazz. This work illustrates the constant dialogue between local identity and global trends, modernism and tradition, and musical fusion, which is socially and culturally relevant. This "Spring is Back" synthesizes these views with a broader context of the revitalization of Jazz in China, illustrating how past influences are reimagined in modern pieces (Euprasert, 2025). As stated by Nathaus and Nott (2022), Western modernity and Shanghai's cultural melting pot status are overarching narratives in the city's dance culture. Scholars have examined the social impacts of commercialisation on gender and class. This research added to the discourse by illuminating the agency of Chinese taxi-dancers, who, while working in a commercialised environment, utilised their art medium to achieve economic independence and social mobility, eventually to the advancement of music culture. Women reimagined what being contemporary and feminine in Shanghai's urban landscape looked like (Nathaus & Nott, 2022). In the context of cultural adaptation and globalisation, Peng & Kaosawang (2023) situated Chinese popular music. Historical evidence indicates that Western style music was imported to China, but was modified to fit the nation's sense of aesthetics as well as political requirements. Standardisation attempts, formal curriculum development, and professional musicianship are also studied by researchers. With an emphasis on modern pedagogy, which incorporates theoretical knowledge, practical

performance ability, and cultural background, this research broadened the extent of this debate. Of closing the distance between earlier influences and contemporary pedagogic methods, stresses how institutionalisation of popular music teaching has enabled jazz and other hybrid styles to flourish once more (Peng & Kaosawang, 2023). Decolonising literature, cultural hybridity, and international music studies were critically explored by Tan (2021). Historically, jazz in China has been largely researched from a Western or hybrid frame, but the structural power relations underpinning this perception have largely been overlooked. To illustrate how academic discourses might be excluding local voices, this research appropriates intersectional studies, institutional gatekeeping research, and academic privilege studies. Acknowledging these multi-levelled power relations—the colonial and postcolonial reception of Western music, indigenous conversion into forms such as yellow music, and scholarly discourse that defines its perceived authenticity—is important to understand Jazz in China, as the literature asserts. Integrating Chinese Jazz into these conversations, the paper brought attention to how educational, political, and cultural systems shape the revival and redefinition of musical styles (Tan, 2021). Schröder (2022) situated the research in the literature on music across authoritarian and colonial regimes. Previous studies have established that music during occupied China was used as a means for individuals to balance expressing their cultural selves with adapting to state requirements. Jazz, traditionally associated with Western modernity, was a problematic kind of music, as listeners challenged the conceptual coherence of each performance. Understanding how performers modified their repertoire, performance, and presentation to be acceptable to local and foreign listeners, this utilised studies on moral challenges in performance, transnational musical exchange, and cultural politics during wartime. Schröder (2022) proved the political necessities at the time disciplined the "oldness" and continuity of Jazz and other hybrid genres in China, proving that musical preservation and revival relied on factors greater than mere cultural tastes.

### RESEARCH QUESTION

Which elements of Jazz music in China has been explored and rejuvenated by yellow music?

### METHODOLOGY

Chaichana (2024) employed a historical-cultural approach, examining travelogues, archival texts, and secondary sources. Methodology emphasises the rethinking of Jazz's presentation across various political periods, ranging from colonialism to communism (Chaichana, 2024). Wang (2022) employed a blended qualitative method that incorporated history education policy research, Chinese Jazz artists and teachers' interviews, and curriculum analysis. This article presents an in-depth perspective on the learning and understanding of Jazz in China (Wang, 2022). Yuan & Chareawrum (2024) employed textual and historical examination, analysing archival documents, musical scores, and available academic work. This method identifies the intersection of society, politics, and music in constructing the history of the Old Shanghai soundscape (Yuan & Chareawrum, 2024). Zhang (2021) employed a sociological perspective,

utilizing secondary literature, policy analysis, and a Chinese musical practice case study. It places music beyond the boundaries of performance, focusing on more general social processes (Zhang, 2021).

Yuhan (2024) employed qualitative interviews with contemporary female Jazz singers, complemented with a historical study of Shanghai's Jazz environment. This combination of methodology allows the research to connect historical trends and live issues, focusing on structural differences in the music industry (Yuhan, 2024). Euprasert (2025) applied a musical analysis of "Spring is Back," including melody, harmony, rhythm, and instrumentation. The writer employed interviews of the composer and performers to place artistic decisions in context and interpret cultural meaning (Euprasert, 2025). Nathaus & Nott (2022) applied a historical-ethnographic methodology, examining archival records like newspapers, adverts, and personal testimonies. The approach enabled reconstitution of taxi dancers' lives and understanding of their role in Shanghai's social life (Nathaus & Nott, 2022).

Peng and Kaosawang (2023) applied a descriptive-analytical method to examine educational curriculum, policy documents, and the historical background of music courses. This method offers insight into the institutionalisation and formalisation of popular music in China (Peng & Kaosawang, 2023). Tan (2021) applied a critical-theoretical method, examining academic literature, ethnomusicological writings, and institutional practice to examine power relations in the construction of musical knowledge (Tan, 2021). Schröder (2022) used historical-archival research, examining concert programs, newspaper reports, and memoirs. This study examines musical networks, repertoire selection, and playing practices during occupation to see how musicians navigated around political and social restrictions (Schröder, 2022).

### RESULT

In a recursive manner, Chaichana (2024) demonstrated that Jazz transformed from a mark of cosmopolitanism to yellow music, censorship under communist rule, and eventual revival after reform. This study established, specifically in terms of Sinicization, that Jazz became a part of Chinese culture and history, creating a mood of "oldness" and "revival" (Chaichana, 2024), instead of merely being an imported form of music. Jazz education in China is increasing, states Wang (2022), but China's cultural bias and institutional limitations are determining variables. Unlike the universal and modern view maintained by artists and students, official establishments tend to standardize Jazz, which curbs freedoms of improvisation. Yet, the fact that Jazz is being offered at colleges indicates that it is making a return and is being embraced as a part of China's cultural modernisation. This backs contention by highlighting how antiquity of Jazz is reimagined in the classroom to keep the genre of music relevant in China's music industry (Wang, 2022). The early Shanghai music provided the foundation for Jazz's subsequent renaissance in China. Its hybrid nature enabled it to make a mark on culture that resonated with the reform era and the modern Jazz renaissance. They believe that Jazz had the capacity to revive in contemporary China due to the fact that, in spite of suppression, the age of the genre turned

into a pool of nostalgia and fantasy. This is an explicit reference to subject, which creates a link between yellow music and the modern-day Jazz revival (Yuan & Chareawrum, 2024). As Zhang (2021) stated hybrid genres such as Jazz demonstrate how state power, cultural memory, and globalisation all contribute to China's musical evolution. The rise and decline of Jazz in China is representative of China's overall musical sociology, whereby the "oldness" of a form can be used as a springboard for something new in terms of cultural expression (Zhang, 2021). Short educational tracks, biased performance decisions, and public judgment are some of the long-term institutional and cultural barriers that Yuhan (2024) discovered female singers to be confronted with. Regardless of these barriers, women persist to demonstrate resilience and shape the current identity of Jazz in China, making the genre boom again. To a great degree, this conforms to the vision of "oldness" giving way to renewal, which illustrates how social and historical forces inform the contemporary Jazz landscape (Yuhan, 2024). According to Euprasert (2025), the structure succeeds in fusing Western Jazz sounds with Chinese musicianship to produce a hybrid sound that resonates with contemporary listeners while staying connected to the historical roots of Jazz. This is reflective of how Chinese Jazz continually evolves, making its "oldness" a driving force for cultural renewal and artistic rejuvenation (Euprasert, 2025). Based on the findings delivered by Nathaus and Nott (2022), Chinese taxi-dancers played an instrumental part in the spread of social dancing in Shanghai. They dismantled gendered barriers and contributed to disseminating dance forms across the globe, all while setting the stage for the city's entertainment culture. Their work gives insight into the nuances of cultural transmission and how local actors at the same time appropriate and appropriate practices introduced from elsewhere (Nathaus & Nott, 2022). Professionalisation and durability of contemporary Chinese music can be ascribed largely to popular music education. Jazz and other forms derived from the Western world are helped by formal teaching, while classical styles such as yellow music find new followers. How historical musical styles impact contemporary music is just one of the ways in which the study exposed the centuries-old tension between tradition and modernisation (Peng & Kaosawang, 2023). As argued by Tan (2021), intellectual and structural power dynamics are imperative in explaining how Jazz is perceived and reemerges in China. The research on "oldness" and rebirth in Chinese music culture is supplemented by the argument in the publication that these elements must be recognized so that one may develop a more nuanced understanding of re-examination of traditional genres like yellow music and early Jazz in contemporary environments (Tan, 2021). Based on Schröder (2022), Jazz and other Western-inspired genres were able to endure and even flourish amidst the occupation due to the survival strategies that musicians employed. In direct opposition to governmental pressure, artists continued performing customs, making a path for future revivals. Theoretically, this validates the study's main assertion by indicating how social negotiation and historical context produced Jazz's survival and subsequent reinterpretation in China (Schröder, 2022).

## DISCUSSION

In a complicated interplay between cultural flexibility, social norms, and collective memory, jazz emerged in China. Although Yuan and Chareawrum (2024) highlight the long-term legacy of

Old Shanghai music as evidence of how hybrid variants persisted in popular memory, Chaichana (2024) highlights the Sinicization of jazz in Shanghai, and how Western genres were reconciled to local tastes. Whereas all three historians have a preoccupation with historical continuity, whereas Chaichana has a greater preoccupation with stylistic adaptation, Yuan and Chareawrum have a greater preoccupation with cultural influence and nostalgia. Whereas most historical accounts have centred upon musical structures, Nathaus and Nott (2022) describe how the taxi-dancers of Shanghai coped with modernity and agency in commodified spaces. This runs counter to other research that has centred upon musical structures alone. Whereas Wang (2022) points to schools as facilitating spaces for renewal, unveiling a tension between societal restrictions and structured learning, Yuhan (2024) documents institutionalised inequalities faced by women Jazz singers, highlighting barriers that Wang had not addressed. A difference between experimental and formal methods is shown by the studies of cross-cultural Jazz composition by Euprasert (2025), which places an emphasis on creative innovation, and by educational practices by Peng & Kaosawang (2023), which place an emphasis on preservation and standardisation. Schröder (2022) demonstrates how political forces in contexts of occupation affect repertoire and performance, and Tan (2021) critiques scholarship and global power dynamics that influence music discourse; these two models are related but distinct approaches to understanding structural mediation. One new insight of this pairing is that the antiquity of jazz can be seen as a repository for the past and a launching pad into the present. Through the deep well of culture that early Jazz and yellow music were capable of generating because of societal restrictions, gendered practice, and repression, musicians, teachers, and composers today can reimagine the genre in a manner that honours its heritage while infusing it with new ideas. By setting up yellow music as a foundation and intermediary between earlier Jazz and its contemporary rebirth in China, this article prioritizes the interrelated roles of education, culture, and social negotiation.

### CONCLUSION

These researches reveal that Chinese jazz is more than music; it's where social processes, culture, and history converge. The transformation of yellow music to contemporary Jazz is mirroring a multi-stage process that involves adaptation, repression, and rebirth. Subsequent study proves that social organisation, gender relations, and institutional structures have considerable influence on the continuation and reception of Jazz, as opposed to previous work on cultural heritage and artistic hybridity. Contrasts between creative innovation, formal pedagogy, and social constraints are indicated by variations in the ways scholars place value on innovation, conservation, or social context. The main contribution of this article is that it acknowledges Jazz's vintage as a mediating factor; Jazz holds structural constraints, cultural nostalgia, and historical remembrance, all which together offer a reservoir for revival in contemporary times. This study gives an in-depth understanding of how historical musical genres influence modern Jazz activities in China by positioning yellow music as both a historical foundation and a creative revision source. Ultimately, then, the return of Jazz is to be understood as a culturally negotiated event, one in which the repression of history, gendered experience,

and pedagogical practice converge to reinvigorate Jazz and link China's musical past to its contemporary culture of innovation.

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