

WOMEN IN THE CIRCLE OF POLITICAL MODESTY: NOBODIES IN MUSIC RESEARCH AMONG CHINESE SCHOLARS

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Abstract

One might think of knowing it all: In Chinese research institutions, people base their admiration on positioning within a professional realm. Is the position powerful and the admiration growing? Might it come with even bigger power in the context of music research, where topics and experiences are still strongly connected to a biologist approach? Is the name of an author or contributor important in this circle? This short study gives some explanations about dealing with gender perspectives in a self-adopted circle of political modesty among Chinese scholars in music research. How do names play a role in addressing research outcomes and their applications? The direct observation span is 2015-2022 in major Chinese cities with larger tertiary educational institutions. Some insights may help understand current issues in the field of music research, used terminology, and priorities in referencing techniques. The gender perspective includes issues that are highly sensitive among those scholars and cannot be simply broken down into straightforward categories. The author is fully aware of the long journey ahead in order to change certain male-centered or -dominated conventions and thinking patterns.

Keywords

Chinese urbanity, Music research, Gender perspectives, Power relations, Names

Introduction

One might think of knowing it all: In Chinese research institutions, people base their admiration on positioning within a professional realm. Is the position powerful and the admiration growing? Might it come with even bigger power in the context of music research, where topics and experiences are still strongly connected to a biologist approach and personal merits? Is the name of an author or contributor important in this circle?

Ironically, the name of the author is not always important. If the name belongs to a student, the name of the supervisor is the only important name. If the name is that of a translator, it might be important to the Key Productivity Indicator (KPI) of that student who strives to get a fully funded scholarship.

Unfortunately, it is not unimportant who did the work. It seems, at least from far, that the name of the translator is more important than that of the author, or that the translator is nearly as creative as the author.

In this context, another less crucial problem may arise. Often, it is seen that the language use of an author is more admirable than the scientific outcome. Whether someone writes well or not, or

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if anyone writes directly in English or Japanese, that seems indeed a true achievement. In sum, the question of whether one knows Chinese among Chinese scholars is a completely different question than in some other places, where it is merely about communication styles?

Now, the last negative impact might be the authorship of a female researcher.

Professors

The Shanghai Conservatory of Music has a number of high-ranking female professors, supervisors, and performers among its staff. Yet, all decision-making positions are distributed among men. This was initially my point of departure. Why is that? We can see in each area that the important contributions are made by both male AND female scholars, yet, the overwhelming majority of all these extolled names are male. We can take any journal produced or any performance brought on stage. Males are the named authors in nearly every one of them. Moreover, women are characterized as especially tough or diligent if they work like men; thus, compensating for an imaginary conception of the 'female'.

陈鸿铎 <u>Chen Hongduo</u>	陈其莲 <u>Chen Qilian</u>
叶登民 <u>Danny Yeh</u>	陈星 <u>Chen Xing</u>
冯长春 <u>Feng Changchun</u>	戴晓莲 <u>Dai Xiaolian</u>
葛毅 <u>Ge Yi</u>	方琼 <u>Fang Qiong</u>
顾平 <u>Gu Ping</u>	郭树荟 <u>Guo Shuhui</u>
韩鍾恩 <u>Han Zhong'en</u>	黄英 <u>Huang Ying</u>
廖昌永 <u>Liao Changyong</u>	李景侠 <u>Li Jingxia</u>
林宏鸣 <u>Lin Hongming</u>	李棠 <u>Li Tang</u>
刘红 <u>Liu Hong</u>	李小诺 <u>Li Xiaonuo</u>
刘英 <u>Liu Ying</u>	唐俊乔 <u>Tang Junqiao</u>
宋波 <u>Song Bo</u>	王丹丹 <u>Wang Dandan</u>
孙国忠 <u>Sun Guozhong</u>	王蔚 <u>Wang Wei</u>
陶辛 <u>Tao Xin</u>	肖梅 <u>Xiao Mei</u>
王凯蔚 <u>Wang Kaiwei</u>	谢乐 <u>Xie Le</u>
韦福根 <u>Wei Fugen</u>	杨学进 <u>Yang Xuejin</u>
徐达维 <u>Xu Dawei</u>	于丽红 <u>Yu Lihong</u>
徐孟东 <u>Xu Mengdong</u>	周丽娟 <u>Zhou Lijuan</u>
杨健 <u>Yang Jian</u>	周温玉 <u>Zhou Wenyu</u>
杨茹文 <u>Yang Ruwen</u>	
詹永明 <u>Zhan Yongming</u>	
张显平 <u>Zhang Xianping</u>	
赵维平 <u>Zhao Weiping</u>	
周正 <u>Zhou Zheng</u>	
朱磊 <u>Zhu Lei</u>	
邹彦 <u>Zou Yan</u>	

Figure 1: All professors accessible via the institutional website of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Here printed with permission. (SHCMUSIC [上海音乐学院], 2021).



Figure 2: Advertising picture for the Shanghai Conservatory of Music to be found on diverse websites. Here printed with permission (SHCMUSIC [上海音乐学院], 2021).

Eighteen women out of 43 are at least professors, as acknowledged in 2021. Now, there are a few more. Maybe all together there are 20 female professors out of a total of 45. However, the final leading group consists only of men, especially, when it comes to musical training. Although the number of female professors is noteworthy, they do not find themselves in decision-making positions. The same goes for Guangxi Arts University, Guangzhou University, Wuhan Conservatory, Xi'an Conservatory, or the Central Conservatory in Beijing.

Sometimes, but not always, the fact of being female is a warning sign of not being able to succeed in a job associated with maleness. Additionally, some musical professions such as “composer”, music theorist”, “sound recordist”, are occupied by male scholars. Rarely, are there any women involved, and if so, it is pointed out as remarkable. Research, writing and being a scholar in these fields are obviously relegated to the male domain, not only in relation to the administration of a large university but also in instances that relate to all decision making. I am not saying that this is a special Chinese issue as this issue is observable almost everywhere in the world where conservatories or universities with art departments operate. Why is that?

Historical Perspectives

A view into history should lead to a clear hint. All “gender studies” regarding the arts, including music, (Citron, 1993; Drinker 1948; McClary, 1991; Solie, 1993, Reitsma, 2014) are “pointing out”, marking the ‘outstanding’ success of women in various musical sub-fields. I personally think that equity is only achieved, if names and gender backgrounds do not play any role in mastering a specific skill such as balancing pro and contra, looking at visionary graphs, teaching in a technically demanding field of some complexity, and writing about them through a musical mind.

Interestingly, at Shanghai Conservatory mainly female students are admitted, but the higher positions in the organization's hierarchical structure are occupied by males.

In other cases, this scheme is very similar. Unfortunately, the entire system of information about university and conservatory policies is to not expose too many personal details about the teaching staff and their duties. Policies of this kind are often taken as an excuse to not make proper references to women in scientific papers, or to make the entire group of employees responsible for possible changes or resulting mistakes. Insofar, it is not possible for the author to name any other institutions with persons held responsible for these texts. Only working places, where the author has had a deeper insight could be taken as entities to gather factual data.

However, the withdrawal from decision-making jobs by women can be problematic and it is not generally proven that the avoiding of complexity is always a choice.

Moving on to the specific situation in urban China: If articles are submitted to scholarly journals, one always finds males dominating the issues, and also among the reviewers or jury members in competitions, we may find that most of the reviewers are males, if the article goes to a prestigious journal (Li and Horta, 2021). The more women are involved, so it seems, the less prestigious is the journal. Then, there are some humanity-caring profiles, in which women seem to dominate such as in subject domains like anthropology of music, organology, and the dramatic arts. Also, one can often find women appointed as translators, arrangers, support staff and even layout editors. However, in the

editorial boards, males are more often present. I recommend that further studies should be initiated as there is almost nothing substantially written about it, not even in developed countries.

Another difficulty is the conditioned humbleness or avoidance of taking responsibility by a majority of these women, not even for good intentions, so, one rarely finds documents being signed with a personal name as, instead, there are ones that are stamped in red with an institutional seal. This context corresponds to the hidden policies in institutions around China, Vietnam, and Laos. The institutional seal represents the hierarchy and cannot be avoided.

It is, on the one hand difficult to recognize female scholars through their names (Levi King, 2022), and it is, on the other hand, difficult to demand personal signatures in general.

In order to support open discussions about gender discriminatory aspects from those discourses, we need to see the authors as real people. This is nothing new, but it proves that with every woman getting into the discussion circle, males are also freed to access all ideas. That could help in establishing a more egalitarian society in which choices are the norm and education is not a privilege.

Thoughts about the Roots of Some Problems and Concluding Questions

This is not only a problem of dominance but of an accepted life model. Although empirical data may show that many female scholars and teachers at prestigious institutions withdraw their demand to be in any leading position (Moustafa, 2020), it cannot be clearly said that this is the case as at least some of them see themselves 'automatically' hindered by their personal circumstances such as being responsible for the general well-being of their families. Women have to cook, to do groceries for the entire family, clean, wash clothes, deal with the homework of the children, and pick them up from school. Although in recent times, grandparents are increasingly involved in these tasks, the typical housewife is still the only accepted role for females, including those families in which they are scholars who need support. This also applies to grandmothers. That might be a strange idea, but it is the case, not only in urban China. We can observe that in most countries, even in modern Europe and America, Australia or Africa, women feel the same about leadership: that leadership positions come with a price tag. So, those women decide to refrain from taking such positions.

Now, let us have a look at the authorships of scholarly articles and research reports. The model of this is also dictated by leading groups of scientists. Especially, in the time of the pandemic, most knowledge had to come from male scholars, spoken out or written down and distributed via media. Only a very few women could hold press conferences and turn academic pages (Johnson and Oliver, 2001). Additionally, they were attributed to be very "male", whatever the meaning of that may be as some have labelled them as being cruel, insistingly sharp, demanding, self-centred, jovial, and/or oblivious their surroundings.

In music research, male dominance is lessening as most of the current students at some art-based universities are females and they continue to write and refuse their traditionally restricted roles as females. This does not change the patriarchal working principles and roles in the realm of academia. Females have to work harder and longer and more in specific order to get the same outcomes as their

male counterparts. That seems to apply to authorships around the world as well (Bernard, 2017). Just recently, I had the opportunity to watch a student quoting from press releases given by men as if press statements are scholarly literature. Only very few women were named, and the ones that were, turned out to be mostly translators or editors. The name of a responsible person is barely given voluntarily, except for prestigious journal articles that are widely and proudly shared in China. If it is international writing, the institutional affiliation is more important and thus, highlighted. Reference lists give good insights into that practice. We find no authors for specific entries and if so, those are male authors. The few female authors who are mentioned seemed to be there only by accident.

The attitude to let affiliations take over authorship responsibilities is not new to China. Many data collections of the past and the present have worked this way (Moustafa 2020). It is an expression of exhibited humbleness and devotion for the hosting institution to exhibit the all-embracing humbleness of their institution. One may find similar issues in the medieval literature of Europe. Now, the hiding of gender is another kind of humbleness or exhibitionism. If a male could sign his paper, then the fact that male or female authors cannot easily be distinguished by the construction of a name, helps cover the identity. This means that a relatively large number of female authors are addressed as male. Another interesting aspect is that specific research areas that are mostly delegated to women are anthropology, string instrument research and voice performance (Prieto et al, 2023), or working in the field of education.

In an advertising website inviting students to apply, it mentions the following about the Shanghai Conservatory of Music (SHCMUSIC [上海音乐学院], 2021):

“Our school adheres to the people-centered creation orientation. Teachers and students have created a large number of musical masterpieces that represent China and influence the world: piano music "Shepherd Boy Piccolo", violin concerto "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai", "Long March Symphony", Zhonghu and Symphony Orchestra "Desert Twilight", art song "To the World Expo"... In recent years, symphonies "Silk Road Dream", "Ode to Yan Huang", opera "He Luting", the musical "Sea Music", "Dream Lin Tang Xianzu" Such original works were funded by the National Art Fund. Several major research topics have been approved by the National Social Science Fund Major Projects, National Social Science Fund Art Major Projects, National Cultural Innovation Projects, and dozens of provincial and ministerial projects and awards. On average, more than 400 art practices and concerts are held every year, the "Shanghai Spring" International Music Festival is held, and various concerts are held on world-class platforms in more than 20 countries to sing the "Voice of China".

This is a typical example of neglecting self-presentation, and women may think the same about themselves; that being trained in the field of music performance and music research means being ready to accept self-neglect, too. Female beauty is mainly there for male consumption, which makes one understand that the consumers are probably mainly meant to be male. It is another world phenomenon. Elderly women have a hard time fighting through this globally ingrained system, even in Shanghai, which is supposed to be the number one city of openness and tolerance in a big country. 'Why is that?' one has to ask. The only way out is for women to stop accepting the situation of being a nobody in music research.

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