2014

Yellow Music: A Transcultural Musical Genre’s Role in Heterogeneous Community Unification

Anita Li

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.wellesley.edu/library_awards

Recommended Citation
http://repository.wellesley.edu/library_awards/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives at Wellesley College Digital Scholarship and Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Library Research Awards by an authorized administrator of Wellesley College Digital Scholarship and Archive. For more information, please contact ir@wellesley.edu.
Yellow Music:
A Transcultural Musical Genre’s Role in Heterogeneous Community Unification

Anita Li

Music 225-Global Pop, Professor Tamar Barzel
Wellesley College
May, 2013

Note: The author would like to thank Professor Barzel for helping her throughout the semester through office hour meetings and detailed assignment comments.
As the earliest form of contemporary Chinese popular music, yellow music was a hybrid musical genre of American jazz, Hollywood film music, and Chinese folk music. Originated in Shanghai, China in the late 1920s, it instigated the golden Chinese Jazz age during the pre-communism interwar period. Yellow music was one of the most evocative music genre in the country’s history, but was rarely studied by music scholars. At the time, the genre was criticized by the republic government and nationalists as “decadent sounds” that were associated with pornography and were “capable of seducing citizens away from the pressing tasks of nation-building and anti-imperialist resistance” (Jones 2001, p.8).

How did the specific cultural, social, and political conditions in Shanghai during 1920s-1940s enable the emergence and widespread popularity of yellow music despite republic governmental opposing pressure? Was its role entirely negative as criticized by the government and nationalists? A close analysis of “Drizzles” and “Nightlife at Shanghai” will be employed to explore the formation and social role of yellow music in China during the early 20th century.

Yellow music was evolved in China’s first modern industrial, commercial, financial center: Shanghai. In 1982, Shanghai was established as the first Chinese city to be opened to trading with the West (Stone 2002, p.353). As part of several treaties, Western powers including France, Germany, and England established foreign districts in the city. By the 1930s, this industrial center was the fourth largest city in the world with a population of 3.5 million people (Moskowitz 2010, p.16). Shanghai attracted many people seeking for employment possibilities, and had the closest contact with Western culture in China. Shanghai was also more than a financial center, as people from varied national and cultural background took residence there. The city’s convenient geographic location and policies that favored commerce turned Shanghai
into not only “a wonderland for adventurers and a paradise for gold diggers”, but also a unique heterogeneous community (Chen 2005, p.107). Many Russians fled to Shanghai from their civil war in 1922, and Filipino instrumentalists sought better living at Shanghai. From 1933 to 1941, Shanghai housed about 200,000 Jewish refugees from Germany (Moskowitz 2010, p.16)). In the 1930s, the city had more than 70,000 foreign national residents (Staton 2003, liner notes). Most of them lived in the prosperous parts of Shanghai with extravagant lifestyle and special social privileges (Stone 2002, p.353).

The weak republic Chinese government ended its reign in 1916, and Chinese regional warlords and Western imperial powers fought for control during the following period until the communism government establishment in 1949. Although all the political powers were publicly against luxurious entertainment, the political turmoil only elevated the night culture in Shanghai. Western cultural products such as fashion, cinema, and music became the hottest trend in Shanghai. Dance and singing halls were the most popular nightlife entertainment, and Shanghai outnumbered any Chinese city in the number of night clubs and cabarets (Chen 2005, p.107). By the mid-1930s, more than 300 cabarets were established in Shanghai (Moskowitz 2010, p.16). At first, western musicians played the same kind of music from their homeland in these dance halls and night clubs, but soon, a new style of music incorporating Chinese melody and American Jazz harmony took over the urban music market by flame.

Yellow music was marked by interwoven Western jazz scales with Chinese pentatonic folk tunes. It was usually performed in format of a leading female Chinese singer accompanied by a big jazz band composed of Anglo-Russian musicians (Stone 2002, p.353). For the Western band musicians, yellow music was very much translatable, as the accompaniment was not very
different from American jazz (Jones 2001, p.79). Characteristics of yellow music included simple chord harmony played by the string-heavy band and charming melody sang by a nasal and childlike female voice. The highly sophisticated lyrics in Mandarin usually contained poetic phrases expressing longing for a better life and romantic emotions (Chen 2005, p.117). As it was meant to be danced to, yellow music had strong pulsation, but the beat had very little syncopation because the adopted Chinese folk tunes were originally written in simple beat. Sometimes, traditional Chinese fiddles and percussions were added to the accompaniment band to keep the regular beat (Chen 2005, p.109).

Yellow music was single-handedly innovated by Jinghui Li who was also responsible for launching the careers of almost all the notable singer and popular musicians of the era. Born in Hunan, China in 1891, Li was interested in all forms of regional folk music and Western popular music since he was young. Early in his career, Li composed twelve children’s opera inspired by Hollywood Broadway musicals, and became an avid patriot and educator (Rock in China). Li aimed to promote Mandarin as the national language through music education and textbook, and was the chief editor of the first children’s magazine in Mandarin (Jones 2001, p.75). His early experiences were shown in his later yellow music compositions. After the tremendous commercial and financial success of his first love song, “Drizzle”,1 Li turned his attention to composing romantic Chinese Jazz and developed the genre through mass media (Chen 2005, p.110). The song, “Drizzle”, was often marked as the very first Chinese popular song (Rock in China) and illustrated Li’s persistent obsession with child-like girlish timbre, advocacy for Mandarin, and populization of folk musical form.

---

1 Drizzle, composed by Li Jinhui (music) and Hong Fangyi (lyrics), performed by Li Minghui (voice) and unknown band, originally released in gramophone record format by the EMI Record Company in 1929.
“Drizzle” was released in 1929 by EMI, the largest record company at the time in Shanghai, and was sang by Li’s daughter, Minghui Li. The song was structured in accordance to Western music progression including instrumental introduction and interlude. The instrumentations were similar to New Orleans jazz band, but the accompaniment texture was fairly simple with trombone, bass, clarinet and others. The string instruments usually either followed the heavily nasal vocal lines in unison or filled in melodies between vocal phrases. Of note, the percussion instrumental break at 0:22-0:26, was made by a traditional Chinese percussion instrument named ban. Ban was made of two prank of bamboo or wooden blocks connected by a string on one end. The collision of the two pranks regulated by the musician’s index finger resulted in its crisp timbre.

The song was composed of four-phrased verses repeated four times with the same melodic material but varied lyrics. The meter was in quadruplets with constant emphasis on the first beat. Of note, the phrases varied in the number of measurers, unlike the usual four measured phrases in most Western music. The singable melody of “Drizzle” stayed in a limited voice range and contained only notes from the traditional Chinese pentatonic scale (C, D, E, G, and A). The first three notes were repeated endlessly by the clarinet and the voice as a recurring motif. The recording contained a constant distortional sizzle that was probably because of the poor recording condition. Due to the limited technology at the time, the song was probably recorded together at a single location. Please see the appendix for a full analysis of the song.

“Drizzle” fully demonstrated the Chinese root in yellow music. In addition to the inclusion of traditional Chinese instrument, its simple harmonic language and lack of
improvisation and polyphonic texture in the accompaniment were typical characteristics of Chinese folk music (Chen 2005, p.108). The singer utilized traditional Chinese singing techniques which were distinguished by the use of nose for high-pitched sound production (Jones 2001, p.27). By the Western open-throat singing standard, Minghui Li’s nasal voice sounded untrained and poorly produced, but Chinese listeners could relate those sounds with various kinds of traditional Chinese musical genres such as Peking opera and minority folk songs. Mainly because of Li’s preference for female singers, yellow music was usually performed by Chinese female singers.

The lyrics of “Drizzle” was in Mandarin, the national language that Li aspired to promote through his music. From the 1920s to the 1940s, the local residents in Shanghai were still speaking in Shanghainese, and each minority in China had its own set of dialects (Berger and Carroll 2003, p.157). The countless Chinese dialects posed a serious communication problem within the heterogeneous nation. Mandarin was mandated to be the national language in 1909 by the Qin government at the time, but it was not officially promoted throughout the nation by the communist government until 1949 (Berger and Carroll 2003, p.158). Li was a forerunner in promoting a national language for China. Interestingly, in China, the specific language of lyrics critically defined which region the genre was representing. In the Chinese standard practice, regional songs were sung in local dialects to show regional distinction (Berger and Carroll 2003, p.157). Therefore, Li’s use of Mandarin in his song lyrics identified yellow music as a national, not regional, musical genre.

The lyrical content of “Drizzle” included descriptions of a natural rain scenery and a girl’s desire to be with her lover. The emotional issue in the lyrics could be connect by audiences
from various social, national, and political background. This universal connectability was typical in yellow music songs, as their lyrics were often written in colloquial lines meant to evoke sentimental feelings from the listeners. At the time, the overly expressions of love in such lyrics were not appropriate for public by traditional Chinese values (Jones 2001, p.8). Thus, the lyrics of yellow music were considered “pornographic” by the Republican government. Nationalists believed that yellow music corrupted citizens and distracted them from the imperative importance of nation-building. Of course, the lyrics of “Drizzle” was neither explicit nor pornographic by today’s standard.

Yellow music was seldom mentioned in modern history of Chinese music. Mainland Chinese scholars simply disparaged yellow music as low leveled music that only won people’s heart for its decadent appeal. Most Chinese articles acknowledged Li’s contribution on education reform and his children’s opera compositions, but didn’t mention anything about his towering presence in yellow music (Jin 2010). This may also be caused by the stereotype that classical western music was composed by intellectuals and was thus superior to popular music which was considered corrupted. On the other hand, Western scholars also disregarded yellow music, assuming that it was not distinctively Chinese (Jones 2001, p.8).

The political powers at the time felt deeply threatened by yellow’s music dominance in urban market media. While Japan and Korea utilized the notion of European music superiority to construct a new national identity to overcome their population heterogeneity (Wade 2004, p.147), China sought to use music to maintain the boundaries between China and the Western countries. The Chinese republic government heavily publicized another emerging modern Chinese music genre, mass music which was a hybrid genre incorporating western symphony
accompaniment, political propaganda music, and Chinese melodies (Jones 2001, p.6). With its political lyrics, mass music was employed by warlords and the weak republic government as a political propaganda for mobilizing masses against Euro-American colonial domination. The republic government banned the distribution of yellow music albums, and adopted mass music as its national emblem to unite its heterogeneous community (Jones 2001, p.8).

Ironically, there were many similarities between mass music and yellow music. Both of these transcultural musical genres incorporated western musical structure and accompaniment with traditional Chinese folk music tunes and lyrics. Their compositions were all inspired by existing musical materials, and appealed to the general Chinese audience by the new and unprecedented pleasure that they brought. Both mass music and yellow music were intended to unite the nation which was composed of numerous minorities and foreign residents, but the government only marked mass music as part of the nation-building project (Jones 2001, p.8). Like many other countries, China faced challenges posed by both internal heterogeneity and the forces of westernization. It overcame these challenges by imposing a new music genre that was beneficial for its political standings and banning other hybrid genres that competed with the national emblem.

The difference between mass music and yellow music that set the latter as an enemy to the government was its lack of political standing. The emotional appeals in yellow music could be related by people with different economic, social, and political backgrounds. This characteristic catalyzed its popularity in urban media market, but situated the music genre as a threat to the government. Although yellow music’s integration was transcultural, yellow music didn’t result in a transnational spread, as a result of the governmental interference. The
influence of yellow music, however, was significant in modernizing Chinese music, as can be seen by the persistence popularity of the most representative yellow music singer, Xuan Zhou, and her song, “Nightlife in Shanghai”.

Xuan Zhou joined Jinhui Li’s company at age twelve, and became a top vocalist and popular film actress during the Chinese Jazz Age. She was celebrated to be born with “the golden voice”, and was one of the few yellow music artists whose fame was simply too monumental to be blocked by the government (Chinese Mirror). Her top hit song, “Nightlife in Shanghai”\(^2\), was still used in today’s movies, commercials, and public festivals.

“Nightlife in Shanghai” was composed by Gexin Chen and its lyrics was written by Yanqia Fan (Various Artists 2005). The song was originally the theme song of the musical movie, *An All-Consuming Love*, which narrated a housewife in wartime Shanghai being forced to become a sing song girl after her husband died. The song was a commentary on the general social discontent toward Shanghai’s decadent lifestyle presented in the night clubs, restaurants, and ballrooms. The lyrics described the citizens who “recklessly wasting their youth away” and those who tried “moving to a new world, a different environment” (lyrics, see appendix).

“Nightlife in Shanghai” exemplified the fact that yellow music didn’t celebrate Western values and foreign imperialism as criticized by the republican government. “Nightlife in Shanghai” highlighted the anguish that ordinary workers felt toward the ostentatious lifestyle of the rich foreigners and the gilded glorious city itself. The music genre itself was not responsible for the representative indulging lifestyle of Shanghainese. The song was written for the ordinary

\(^2\) “Nightlife in Shanghai”, composed by Gexin Chen (music) and Yanqia Fan (lyrics), performed by Xuan Zhou (voice) and unknown band, originally released in 1946 and reissued by China Record Corporation in 2005.
people who had to worry “about clothing, food, car fare, and a place to sleep” (lyrics, see appendix).

“Nightlife in Shanghai” started with a jazzy opening by trumpet and string instruments. The voice melody was introduced after a transient stop time at 0:09. The rhythm was in a quadruple meter with emphasis on the first and third beat. Like most yellow music songs, the texture was simple with string instruments as the core accompaniment keeping the beat, while piano and clarinet filled in the melody between phrases. As traditional folk music usually had limited instrumentation, yellow music composers tend to keep the accompaniment to be no more than three voices. During the clearly marked instrumental interlude, the melody was exchanged by solo instruments in the order of string, piano, and clarinet. As a result of its consistent pulsation in the background, yellow music rarely had vocal or instrumental improvisation.

“Nightlife in Shanghai” was written in three verse format with two of the verses being repeated. Zhou’s voice had a high pitched and nasal timbre which worked well in both the staccato and rubato parts. The melody had a limited range with the first few notes as the repeating motif. As “Nightlife in Shanghai” was composed at a later time than “Drizzle”, “Nightlife in Shanghai” melody had some non-pentatonic notes, but the repeating six notes (E, A, G, D, A, G) in the motif were in the pentatonic scale. Please see the appendix for a full analysis of the song. Interestingly, both “Drizzle” and “Nightlife at Shanghai” were under three minutes long, as most gramophone records at the time had three minutes maximum (Moskowitz 2010, p.17).
Improvement of urban mass media technology in gramophone, film, and wireless radio was the main reason that the Chinese republic government couldn’t entirely control the popularity of yellow music. In the early 1900s, 78-rpm gramophone dices with three minutes limit per disc was the emblem of modernity and made yellow music available across the whole nation. Gramophone player was not available in private homes at the time yet, so people had to borrow them during special occasions. Gramophone culture turned music enjoyment from public gathering to private consumption, and signified “middle-class leisure, urban sophistication, and domestic felicity” (Jones 2001, p.54). Numerous record factories including those owned by world famous record companies such as Pathe and EMI were opened in Shanghai staring in the 1910s. About 2.7 million records per year were produced during that time (Moskowitz 2010, p.17).

The yellow music singers increased their popularity by appearing in films and participating in film music productions. In 1927, China had 106 movie theaters, and 26 of them were in Shanghai (Moskowitz 2010). Sheet music of the theme song and music played during intermissions were handed to the movie audience. The popularity of the music usually outlasted the movie itself. In addition, the fast proliferation of wireless radio stations helped to spread yellow music across the country despite the republican governmental control. More than half of these stations were established in Shanghai (Chen 2005, p.108).

The transcultural community of Shanghai made the evolution of yellow music possible. In return, yellow music united the various cultural elements into one which was shared by people from different backgrounds through the help of mass media. On the one hand, Chinese audiences enjoyed yellow music’s pentatonic folk music tunes and traditional Chinese vocal
techniques. On the other hand, the harmony and jazzy accompaniment allowed Western audiences to enjoy and interpret Chinese music as music, not just noises.

When Japan took over Shanghai in 1937, Japan closed down all theaters and night clubs, fearing that the mass media and music would cause unrest. By 1949 when the communism government took reign, the golden age of yellow music had ended (Moskowitz 2010, p.18). Musicians and entrepreneurs in the entertainment industry fled from Shanghai to Hong Kong and Taiwan. Chinese popular music was then developed in those two locations from the 1940s to the 1960s, and was reintroduced back to the mainland of China in the 1960s (Stone 2002, p.353). In recent years, there was a revival of Shanghai jazz with Xuan Zhou as the leading star, mainly driven by people’s nostalgia for the past prosperity of Shanghai (Chen 2005, p.107). Her songs were interpreted by audiences as an attractive commodity and contained “rich and colorful nation heritage” (Stock 1995, p.129). Today, Shanghai’s pre-communism history was not only respectable, about also something to emulate during the recent economic growth in China.

Although some Shanghainese recognized yellow music as part of Shanghai identity and its cultural independence from the rest of the nation, the music itself was a significant part of the national musical history. Yellow music’s popularity in the nation was limited by the governmental and nationalists opposition due to their stereotype on popular music and the genre’s lack of political standing. Yellow music laid the foundation for today’s Chinese popular music, while mass music was developed into ‘red mass songs’ used as political propaganda for the Chinese communist government (Stanton et al. 2003, liner notes). Several international musicians recently started projects to restore yellow music through the blending of electronic
instruments and rock beats (Undercover Culture 2008, liner notes). Interestingly, the Shanghai Restoration Project led by Dave Liang, a Chinese American musician, masterfully remixed Xuan Zhou’s “Nightlife at Shanghai” (Restoration Project 2006). The project further demonstrated the infinite possibility of yellow music and how existing musical materials could be creatively utilized for synthesis of new music. Who knows, Liang may be starting a new trend in music just like Jinghui Li in the 1920s. The rolling cycle of musical creation never ends!
**Song Appendix:**

“Drizzle”
Minghui Li (voice) and unknown band, originally recorded in Shanghai and released in gramophone record format in 1926 by the Pathé Records Company at Shanghai, China

Genre: Early Chinese Jazz/Yellow Music
Lyrics Language: Mandarin Chinese

Lyrics Translated by Andrew Jones and edited by Anita Li:

**Verse 1**
Drizzle keeps falling
The breeze keeps blowing
In the breeze and the light rain, the willows turn green
Aiyoyo! The willows are green...

**Verse 2**
Little darling, I don’t want your gold
Little darling, I don’t want your silver
All this little girl wants is your heart
Aiyoyo! All I want is your heart...

**Verse 3**
Drizzle and rain, don’t be such a pain
Light breeze, don’t be such a tease
It’s so much harder to walk through the wind and rain
Aiyoyo! Harder to walk in the rain...

**Verse 4**
Young man, the sun has just risen over the hills
Young girl, the lotus flowers are starting to show their petals
Don’t wait ’til the flowers are dead and the sun has set behind the hills
Aiyoyo! The sun has set behind the hills...

**Listening Map:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:00-0:21</td>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>Four phrased melody was exchanged among trombone, trumpet, and string instruments. The first two phrases were three measures long, and the last two phrases were five measures in total. The pulse played by the string bass started on the third phrase. Of note, the last beat of the first phrase at 0:06 was emphasized using cha, a Chinese instrument which is similar to a small-sized cymbal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
0:22-0:26 10-12  Percussion Break  After a very brief stop time, there was a solo of *ban*, a Chinese percussion instrument made of bamboo blocks. *Ban* beat the quadruple with increasing number of hits per beat for two measures.

0:27-0:50 13-23  Verse 1  Nasal and high pitched female voice entered with the return of string bass pulsation. Clarinet played in unison with the voice melody lines.

0:50-1:12 24-34  Verse 2  Similar to verse one, except with different lyrics.

1:12-1:59 35-56  Instrumental Interlude  The four phrased melody repeated twice. First time was played by the trombone, while the second time was played by the clarinet at a softer voice.

2:00-2:22 57-67  Verse 3  Similar to verse one, except with different lyrics.

2:23-2:49 68-78  Verse 4+ Ending  The last phrase was slowed down, and *cha* was used again at the ending.

"Nightlife in Shanghai"/Famous Female Singers from Shanghai (reissued by China Record Corporation in 2005)
Xuan Zhou (voice) and unknown band, originally recorded in Shanghai and released in gramophone record format in 1946 by the EMI Records Company at Shanghai, China
Genre: Early Chinese Jazz/Yellow Music
Lyrics Language: Mandarin Chinese
Lyrics Translated by Andrew Jones and edited by Anita Li:

Verse 1

*Shanghai at night, Shanghai at night, you’re the city that never sleeps*
*The bright lights go on, the cars roar, dance music leaps*
*There she is, greeting you with a smiling face, but who can see the anguish underneath?*
*Her night life is all about clothing, food, car fare, and a place to sleep*

Verse 2

*If the wine doesn’t get them drunk they’ll find another way*
*Recklessly wasting their youth away*
*The sky at dawn is indistinct and blurry, they woke up*
*To their homes they return, heads spinning like the car wheels*

Verse 3

*Try moving to a new world, a different environment*
*Thinking back on nightlife, it will all seem like waking up from a dream*
(repeat) If the wine doesn’t get them drunk they’ll find another way
Recklessly wasting their youth away
The sky at dawn is indistinct and blurry, they woke up
To their homes they return, heads spinning like the car wheels

Try moving to a new world, a different environment
Thinking back on nightlife, it will all seem like waking up from a dream

Listening Map:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:00-0:10</td>
<td></td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>A very short introduction with trumpet announcing for the audiences’ attention. Next, various string instruments played a variation of the motif, elongating the last notes to create tensions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:11-0:45</td>
<td>1-16</td>
<td>Verse 1</td>
<td>The nasal female voice enters with the strong pulsation of string instruments. The trumpet played in unison with the voice melody most of the time, but added some extra notes at the end of each phrase. The verse was composed of four phrases each of which has four measures. The melody had a strong pulsation with staccato. The end of the verse was characterized by a brief bass string’s answer and piano’s downward scale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:46-1:10</td>
<td>17-29</td>
<td>Verse 2</td>
<td>New rubato melody materials were introduced with a higher range of voice. The verse was composed of two longer phrases each of which had six measures. The texture was richer than verse one, as piano ornaments were added between phrases. At the end of the verse, the string drove up a climatic scale. The tension was resolved by a downward scale by the piano.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:11-1:27</td>
<td>24-34</td>
<td>Verse 3</td>
<td>Similar melodic lines to verse one. However, it had two phrases, richer texture, and different lyrics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:28-2:03</td>
<td>35-56</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>The string and woodwind instruments started out with a modified version of the melody in verse one, but returned to the original melody of verse one on the third measure. The last two melody</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
phrases were exchanged in the order of string, piano, and clarinet accompanied by much lighter texture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:04-2:27</td>
<td>57-67</td>
<td>Verse 2 Repeat of verse two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:28-2:52</td>
<td>68-78</td>
<td>Verse 3+ Ending After the repeat of verse three, the last phrase was slowed down a little bit and was closed off by piano ornaments and string chords.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography:


The reference book contains a collection of essays examining the role of language in popular music. The thematic concepts mentioned in this book give insight on the choice of language in yellow music lyrics and the genre’s attachment to Shanghai. In addition, one article by Sue Tuohy focuses on regional attachments and dialect in Chinese music.


The article gives an overview of how yellow music was evolved and its significance as the earliest form of contemporary Chinese popular music. I utilized the general musical elements of yellow music that Chen mentioned to analyze why the two songs that I chose were representative of the genre. This article also helped me during the writing of the appendix listening maps.


The website contains a biography of Zhou Xuan, focusing mainly on her singing and filmography career. The description also gives insights on how the earliest Chinese stardom system worked under Jinhui Li. The biography of Zhou Xuan demonstrates that she was one of the few yellow music artists whose fame was untouched by the governmental censorship.


The Yellow Music Ensemble aims to revive yellow music through the use of modern instrument. Their official website not only introduces the artists and albums, but also explains why the group aspired to revive this fusion genre. One of its page contains a short overview of Shanghai jazz history.


This book analyzes yellow music from the historical and cultural perspectives. Particularly, it focuses on how the Chinese government utilized mass music, another emerging pop genre at the time, to compete with yellow music through censorship and mass media. In addition, the sample music analysis illustrates the representative characteristics of yellow music and mass music.


The book gives an introduction of traditional Chinese music and Chinese folk music in general by having a brief description of each genre and instrument. Shanghai Jazz is the fusion of Chinese folk music and Jazz, so the book contains information about the Chinese root of
Shanghai Jazz. Of note, the book doesn’t mention Shanghai jazz at all in the popular music section.


The book has a chapter on Shanghai’s Jazz Era as the root of Chinese pop music. It focuses on the particular political and social situations at Shanghai that made the wide popularity of yellow music possible. The statistical data on Shanghai population and size of its mass media industry provided substantial evidences for my thesis.

Rock in China. "Chapter II - About the History of Chinese 'Popular' Music"


*Der Lange Marsch des Rock’n’Roll* by Andreas Steen is a book about the history of Chinese popular music. Rock in China is a website that aims to collect information about the Chinese rock history. It collected a chapter of Steen’s book on Shanghai Jazz translated from German to English by Max-Leonhard von Schaper. The chapter gives an overview of Shanghai Jazz including a brief biography of Li Jinhui and Zhou Xuan.


The Shanghai Restoration Project is an Asian-American contemporary group that remixes and composes new works based on popular songs during the Shanghai Jazz Age. Their debut album inspired me to choose yellow music as my final paper topic. Dave Liang, the producer of the project, is very famous among current Asian American musicians.


The sound record contains a diverse range of Chinese music including ancient Chinese music, folk songs, original Shanghai jazz, and latest underground pop music. It stresses the diversity of Chinese popular music. In its liner’s note, it recognized yellow music as the origin of Chinese pop.


The informal article gives insight on how Chinese listeners interpreted Zhou Xuan’s songs and how their perceptions changed during different time periods. It also highlights that her popularity still persist in today’s Chinese society, as her songs are played in public events and TV commercials.


The Garland Encyclopedia introduces each musical genre of East Asia through a short overview. The chapter on early forms of Chinese pop covers the musical forces in Shanghai,
Yellow Music

Hong Kong, and Taiwan that shaped modern Chinese popular music. It specifically notes the reintroduction of yellow music into mainland China in the 1960s.

Undercover Culture. "Shanghai Restoration Project - Interview W/ Dave Liang"
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4rXtNYB324.

The video records a short interview of Dave Liang (the producer of Shanghai restoration Project albums) with visual contents explain the goals of the projects and how they were done. There is also a YouTube playlist consisting more radio interviews of him (each less than 10 minutes) at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4rXtNYB324&list=PLC29BE64D4B9A2438. These videos demonstrate the group's understanding of yellow music history and its role in the Chinese pop history.

Various Artists. "Famous Female Singers from Shanghai (Lao Shanghai Hong Ling De Jue Shi Ge Sheng)."
China: China Record Corporation, 2005.

This album consists of 37 famous songs by famous female Shanghainese artists including Zhou Xuan recorded during the 1930s. “Night at Shanghai” by Zhou Xuan is reissued in this album. Of note, the other song that I analyzed, “Drizzle”, is rarely reissued due to governmental control. The song can be found on YouTube at
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYMAUSajDgk.