

Course Form for PKU Summer School International 2026

Course Title	Title in English: Grooving China: Pop Music and Social Transformation
	Title in Chinese: 乐韵中国：流行歌曲与社会变迁
Teacher	Yunhui Zhao
First day of classes	July 6
Last day of classes	July 17
Course Credit	3 credits
Course Description	
Objective:	
This general-education course welcomes PKU's Summer School international students who are eager to explore and understand China better. Since the New Culture Movement, China has undergone over a hundred years of change ranging from politics, economy, culture, to social issues and ways of thinking. Throughout this process, Chinese pop songs have been closely associated with the country's changes thanks to the genre's all-inclusive lyrical and musical styles, as well as its shifting presentations. Meanwhile, by reflecting the spirit and the hot topics of the times, pop music also seemed to suggest the direction in which the specific eras were going. In this course we will trace the historical development of pop music in China and zero in on selected focal points. Students will be introduced to pop songs from various periods and trained to analyze the development of particular styles. We will explore the historical backgrounds, listen to a selection of iconic pop songs, analyze the text of the lyrics, and connect the songs to relevant social issues. Through the lens of pop music, we seek to understand the fundamental changes and development that have taken place in China's recent past in a relatively relaxed manner.	
Pre-requisites /Target audience	
International students enrolled in PKUSSI, including undergraduates and postgraduates.	
Proceeding of the Course	
Each session/lecture meets for three credit hours in the morning, with ten sessions/lectures total, and two credit hours of seminar or field work related to the daily topic.	
Assignments (essay or other forms)	
In-class Discussions: After each lecture within the session, students will have in-class group discussions. Term Paper: Select a topic from the following and write a term paper of about fifteen pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt.	

1. The function of art in a given revolution 2. Are commercialization and art for art's sake diametrically opposed to each other?	
Evaluation Details	
1. Attendance: 10% 2. Group Discussions: 40% 3. Term Paper: 50%	
Text Books and Reading Materials The course instructor will provide necessary materials.	
Academic Integrity (If necessary)	
CLASS SCHEDULE (Subject to adjustment)	
Session 1: Pop Songs from the 1920s to the 1940s	Date: July 6
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) 1. Background: After the New Culture Movement, individual liberation and women's liberation became mainstream topics. Against this background, China's first pop song was born in Shanghai in 1927. In the following two decades, thanks to Shanghai's standing as a center of the world's pop culture, and especially to its so-called "Lone Island Culture" during World War II, the city gave rise to a huge number of pop songs. 2. Introduction to Selected Songs: The pop songs of this period fall largely into the following categories: A: Pop songs based on Chinese folk music, as represented by the work of Li Jinhui and Li Shutong; B: Pop songs influenced by American Jazz and western music; C: Pop songs lyricizing about patriotism and personal dedication 3. Textual analysis of lyrics (1-2 songs from each category)	
【Questions】 Seminar topic: 1. Warm-up: What you know about Shanghai 2. The complexity of Shanghai from the perspective of various styles of pop songs and other aspects	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】 The course instructor will provide the texts of lyrics and MP3s of the songs.	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】 1. Try to learn one of the songs discussed in class. 2. Ask a few Chinese people their impression of Shanghai	
Session 2: Pop Music from the 1950s to the 1970s	Date: July 7

【Description of the Session】(purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) 1. Background: The Chinese people were filled with pride for independence and expectations for the future after the founding of the PRC. The first Five-Year Plan was implemented early in socialist economic development. Women's status saw unprecedented improvement, and the notion that women hold up half the sky became widely accepted. Ethnic unity is emphasized. 2. Introduction to Selected Songs: The pop songs of this period fall largely into the following categories: A: Odes to national independence, prosperity, and strength B: Odes to the accomplishments of socialist economic construction C: Odes to the Great Leader Mao D: Emergence of children's songs E: Ethnic songs F: Model Plays 3. Textual analysis of lyrics (1-2 songs from each category) 4. Learn the song "Small Swallow" in class	
【Questions】 Seminar topic: 1. Warm-up: What do you think is a <i>beautiful</i> song? What do you think is a <i>good</i> song? 2. Confucianism believes that good music should be "perfect", which should not only have the beauty of art, but also carry the function of education (“尽善尽美”). What's your opinion about the above music theory?	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】 The course instructor will provide the texts of lyrics and MP3s of the songs.	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】 Learn the following idioms on music from ancient Chinese still used today 1. 尽善尽美(jìnshàn jìn měi) be perfect 2. 余音绕梁(yúyīnràoliáng) the music lingers in the air long after the performance	
Session 3: Pop Music from 1980 to 1985	Date: July 8
【Description of the Session】(purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) 1. Background: The early years of reform and opening-up saw a clash of ideas old and new. Opinions diverged sharply regarding pop music, with conservatives insisting that it is "decadent," "screaming at the top of the lungs," and that its singers are "weirdly dressed." The younger generations, however, quickly adopted new trends and did their part to popularize the genre. As social order was restored, people's mentality shifted to embrace a better future. Cantopop and Taiwan Pop rose to fame in the late 1970s, and came onto the mainstream stage during this period. 2. Introduction to Selected Songs: The pop songs of this period fall mainly into the following categories: A. Listeners' 15 Favorite Songs from the 1980s B. Nostalgia for Home, the 1980 song causing a massive social debate C. Original songs of diverse styles D. Chinese covers of English, German, and Japanese songs E. Popularization of HK and Taiwanese Pop F. Songs and Singers that gained fame through the Spring Festival Gala Show 3. Textual analysis of lyrics (1-2 songs from each category)	
【Questions】 Seminar topic: Reading ten articles criticizing new pop songs at that time to be handed out in class 1. Warm-up: Briefing the article sent to you in the class and your opinion of this article 2. Group discussion of the violent controversy between the old and the new	

【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】 The course instructor will provide the texts of lyrics and MP3s of the songs.	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】 None	
Session 4: Pop Music in Taiwan since the 1980s	Date: July 9
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) 1. Background: Taiwan's economy took off in the early 1980s and became one of the Four Little Dragons of Asia. As social activities picked up pace, legal protection of copyrights strengthened, guiding the creation of pop music towards a mature age. Many singer-songwriters drew attention to the idea of China, to reflections on tradition and modernity, and to the local and global relationship. 2. Introduction to Singers and Songs Taiwanese singers/songs of note from this period include: Various Artists: Tomorrow Will Be Better Lo Ta-yu, Julie Su, Jonathan Lee, Chyi Chin, Chang Yu-sheng, Angus Tung, Emil Wakin Chau, Phil Chang, Harlem Yu, Mai Meng, Jeff Chang, Mavis Fan, Valen Hsu, Coco Lee, Renee Liu, Jolin Tsai, Wang Leehom 3. Learn Harlem Yu's song "Can't Help Myself" in class	
【Questions】 Field trip in Beijing	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】 The course instructor will provide the texts of lyrics and MP3s of the songs.	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】 None	
Session 5: Rock Bands since 1986	Date: July 10
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) 1. Background: From 1986 to the mid 1990s, the youths of China considered the national destiny their own task, as they turned to contemplate the weighty question of where China would go next after ten years of reform and opening up. From these contemplations emerged Chinese rock. In 1986, Cui Jian performed his song "Nothing to My Name" at the first <i>100 Singers Concert</i> , marking the birth of Chinese rock. The Chinese Rock Power concert held at HK's Hung Hom Coliseum in 1994 brought a host of Chinese rock bands to the foreground. As the market economy grew rapidly since 2000, a large migrant population swarmed into the cities, creating the phenomenon of "Beijing Drifters." Concerned with the tension between what is and what ought to be, rock music from this period reflected the youths' attention to individual destinies and personal development. 2. Introduction to Selected Songs: Rock bands from this period included the following: ADO, Black Panther, Tang Dynasty, Breathe, Reincarnation, Compass, Overload, Cobra (the first women's rock band)	

Cui Jian The Rock Records Three: He Yong, Zhang Chu, Dou Wei Zheng Jun, Xu Wei Wang Feng, Zhao Lei Beyond, Tai Chi, Mayday, Shin Band, Accuse Five, Wu Bai	
【Questions】 Seminar topic: 1. Warm up: Which one of the rock songs/bands covered in class is your favorite? Give your reasons. 2. Whether or not young people have a vital responsibility for social progress or decline?	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】 The course instructor will provide the texts of lyrics and MP3s of the songs.	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】 Review the songs introduced in class; enjoy the weekend.	
Session 6: Pop Music from 1986 to 1990	Date: July 13
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) 1. Background: Ten years of reform and opening up have nurtured diverse ideas. The economy was growing rapidly, and the music was becoming increasingly commercialized. TV had become widely accessible, and more and more shows were available, attracting songwriters and singers of pop. The so-called “Root-Seeking Culture” of this period influenced pop music. Connections between HK, Taiwan, and the Mainland were enhanced. WHAM!’s 1985 concert at the Workers’ Stadium in Beijing marked the beginning of western pop music’s inroads into China. 2. Introduction to Selected Songs: The pop songs of this period fall mainly into the following categories: A: 1986, 100 pop stars perform <i>Fill the World with Love</i> B: 1986, the batch of singers and pop songs emerging from the First National Folk and Popular Songs Competition C: the Northwest Wind D: Disco E: Original pop songs of other styles	
【Questions】 Seminar topic: 1. Warm-up: Introduce a “folk ballad” from your own country or a disco song that you know 2. The impact of copyright on pop music creation and spread, and popularity	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】 The course instructor will provide the texts of lyrics and MP3s of the songs.	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】 Look up news coverage of WHAM!’s 1985 Beijing tour.	
Session 7: HK Cantopop since the 1980s	Date: July 14

【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) 1. Background: “Puluo Culture,” or pop culture of the people, has always thrived in HK. Rapid scaling of the industrial production of pop music, coupled with the city’s mix of East-West cultures, made the 1980s “the golden age of pop music.” 2. Introduction to the well-known singers and songs: Pop singers of HK from this period included: Alan Tam vs. Leslie Cheung, Anita Mui vs. Priscilla Chan, Danny Chan, George Lam, Hacken Lee Sally Yeh, Sandy Lam, Faye Wong, The Four Kings of Pop: Jacky Cheung, Andy Lau, Leon Lai, Aaron Kwok 3. Textual analysis of lyrics (1-2 songs from each category) 4. Learn Sally Yeh’s song “A Carefree Walk” in class	
【Questions】 Field trip in Beijing	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】 The course instructor will provide the texts of lyrics and MP3s of the songs.	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】 None	
Session 8: Pop Music from 1990 to 2000	Date: July 15
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) 1. Deng Xiaoping delivered his Southern Tour Remarks in Shenzhen in 1992, ushering in the market economy in China. People left their “official” jobs, broke their “iron rice bowls,” and “jumped into the sea.” Urban centers saw a sharp increase in migrant population, and Guangdong acquired the status of a pop culture center thanks to its special economic zones. China promulgated the Copyright Protection Law, combining commercial and professional record labels and charts to promote pop music. The prevalence of karaoke bars also deepened the reach of pop music. 2. Introduction to Singers and Songs Singers/songs of note from this period include: “A Spring Story” The most successful star-making case study: Yang Yuying and Mao Ning A burst of original songs: “Xiao Fang,” “A Letter to Home,” “I’m the One Missing You,” “Are You Okay, Big Brother?” “Lovebirds,” “Peace to You,” Golden Age of Campus Ballads “The Girl Sitting Next to Me,” “My Brother Who’s on the Top Bunk,” “Age of White Clothes,” “To Whom Do I Owe My Loneliness,” “With You in My Life,” “In a Strange Land” 3. Textual analysis of lyrics 4. Learn the song “I Covered Your Eyes Mischievously” in class	
【Questions】 1. Warm-up: Guangdong city and people in Chinese mind 2. The relationship between the transfer of discourse power and economic development	

【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】 The course instructor will provide the texts of lyrics and MP3s of the songs.	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】 None	
Session 9: Talent Shows, Boy Groups, and Girl Groups	Date: July 16
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) 1. Introduction to Background Influential Groups: Xiao Hu Dui, F4, S.H.E., TF Boys, Phoenix Legend The Rise of Grassroots Culture, Star-Making Movements 2 Major Talent Shows: 2003, Hunan TV, First <i>Super Girl</i> 2004, Hunan TV, <i>I Am What I Am</i> 2005, Hunan TV, Second <i>Super Girl</i> becomes a hot social topic On various TV channels: The Star Walk, Happy Boy, Happy Girl, Absolute Singing, Go Boys, I Am Singer, The Voice China, The Coming One, Masked Singer China On various streaming platforms: Idol Producer, Produce Camp, Youth with You 1. Introduction to major singers, groups, and songs Xiao Hu Dui, F4, S.H.E., TF Boys, Phoenix Legend Li Yuchun, Zhou Bichang, Zhang Liangying, Tan Weiwei, Zhang Bichen, Shang Wenjie Zhang Jie, Hua Chenyu, Mao Buyi, Zhou Shen, Deng Ziqi Nine Percent, Rocket Girls 101, RISE 2. Textual analysis of lyrics (one song from each singer/group) 3. Learn Li Yuchun's song "See You at the Next Intersection" in class	
【Questions】 1. Warm-up: Watch a clip of Chinese TV talent show. 2. Seminar topic: The star-making movement and fanaticism (饭圈 fànquān, fandom)	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】 The course instructor will provide the texts of lyrics and MP3s of the songs.	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】 Self-study after class: Mao Buyi, "Person like Me"; Zhou Shen, "Wind is Rising"	
Session 10: Chinese Pop: Ways of Dissemination and Particularities	Date: July 17
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) Ways of Dissemination, with Examples by video and audio: 1. TV and Film 2. Radio 3. Dance Halls 4. TV Shows, the Spring Festival Gala Show 5. Rehearsals and Performances at School and Mainstream Social Events	

6. Social media, Internet

【Questions】

Students to raise questions based on the lecture

【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】

None

【Assignments for this session (if any)】

None

A CV of 250-300 words and a high-resolution personal photo should also be provided

Zhao Yunhui is an associate professor at the International College for Chinese Studies at Peking University. She has served as the director of long-term and special projects at the college. Zhao earned a B.A. and an M.A. in Chinese literature from PKU, as well as a Ph.D. in Chinese political thought from the Chinese University of Political Science and Law. Over her three-decade career, she has taught at universities in Thailand, the U.S., Japan, the U.K., and Egypt. She has provided courses on intensive reading, spoken Chinese, listening comprehension, writing, readings in journalism, classical Chinese, TV and Film Chinese, selected readings in Chinese literature, and the history of Chinese literature, as well as training courses for Chinese teachers. Recently, Zhao has concentrated her research interests on culture, along with the development and teaching of courses in cross-cultural communications. She has delivered numerous lectures on culture for the Summer and Winter Programs organized by PKU's Office of International Relations.

