

Review on Music TV Talent Show in China

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Abstract

This study aims to review the definition, development, current state, challenges, and future trends of music television talent shows in China, thereby enhancing producers' creative abilities. Chinese music television talent shows have undergone three developmental stages, with their content reflecting the background and social culture of China's entertainment television programming. With the rapid economic growth, television stations have increased their investment in music talent shows to strengthen their audience base, while online platforms have also provided new viewing channels for these programs. As a result, Chinese music television talent shows have become an important window for domestic and international audiences to understand China's history, culture, and traditions, presenting a multidimensional and comprehensive image of China to the world.

Keywords: TV, TV Program, Music TV Program, Watching TV; Music TV Talent Show

The study of music television talent shows has garnered significant scholarly attention, both within and outside China. Notably, Aleshinskaya and Gritsenko (2016) conducted a study using *The Voice of Russia* as a case study, investigating language practices and language ideologies within music television shows. Similarly, Ganguly (2019) delved into the transformation of music entertainment television in India, with a focus on the global television formats and production cultures, drawing from the example of *Indian Idol*. Lothwesen and Müllensiefen (2007) conducted a comparative analysis, examining how adolescents perceive pop music stars and TV talent show contestants differently. Albrecht (2019) concentrated on artist development within music talent shows, while Chudy (2018) explored the life changes experienced by participants after their involvement in music TV talent shows, such as *The Voice of Poland*. Some Chinese scholars have studied Western music television talent shows from the perspective of popular culture. Zeng (2016) analyzed American talent shows from the perspective of popular culture, pointing out that the success of *American Idol* lies in stimulating the audience's production of meaning, pleasure, and a sense of identity. According to Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory, Wang (2015) analyzed the audience of the 13th season of *American Idol* and found that viewers did not decode the program in the manner expected by the producers. Instead, they decoded it based on their

individual educational backgrounds and social values. Additionally, some scholars have analyzed the success factors of Britain's Got Talent, including the attractiveness of the program's content, the personalization of the program's protagonists, and the diversity of the program's presentation (Zhang, 2011). However, there is limited research on the viewing effects on Chinese audiences for foreign music television talent shows.

On the other hand, research on music TV talent shows in China has been predominantly concentrated on several other areas. Some scholars have explored the evolution of Chinese music talent shows over two decades (Song, 2016) and the innovative developments within these shows (Song, 2021; Dong, 2013). One study examined models for introducing similar overseas show formats and innovations in the show's format (Huang, 2017). Several researchers have investigated the music content (Chen, 2014) and original compositions (Liu, 2022) featured in Chinese TV music talent shows, as well as their broader impact on the Chinese music landscape (Wu, 2015; Geng, 2014). Additionally, some studies have focused on the unique context of music TV talent shows in ethnic minority areas in Xinjiang (Feng, 2017). Others have studied the supply chain associated with these shows (Bi, 2014). The production technology of TV music talent shows in China has also been explored, with scholars such as Chen (2015) studying sound processing and dissemination effects in *The Voice of China*, and Gu (2014) examining music editing practices. Some scholars have compared the judging comments of talent shows like *Got Talent* in China and the UK (Wen, 2017), and others have analyzed cultural integration and differences using Chinese and Western music television talent shows as examples (He, 2011; Pan & Wu, 2017).

Despite the extensive body of research outlined above, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific effects of music television talent shows on Chinese audiences. While much has been written about the global influence of these formats, little attention has been paid to how Chinese audiences engage with these shows, particularly in terms of cultural impact, social influence, and media consumption patterns. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the impact of TV music talent shows in China. By focusing on the intersection of media, culture, and society, the study contributes to a better understanding of how these shows reflect and shape Chinese cultural identity, offering valuable insights into the broader implications for the Chinese entertainment industry and its global reception.

Definition of Music TV Talent Show

Television (TV), defined as the electronic transmission of moving images and sound from a source to a receiver, has exerted significant impact on society by extending the faculties of vision and hearing beyond the constraints of physical distance (Fisher, 2020). The term "TV programs" pertains to the final organizational and broadcasting formats encompassing various content offerings of television stations (Zhao & Wang, 1999). These TV programs encompass specific content and formats produced by television stations and other TV production organizations for broadcast or dissemination (Zhao & Wang, 1999). Several researchers categorized the assortment of the TV programs. Where McQueen and Miao (2003) provided a categorization of TV programs, highlighting their diversity, which includes soap operas, sitcoms, police series, quiz shows, news programs, game shows, and documentaries. In parallel, Xu and Xu (2006) presented a more comprehensive taxonomy, dividing TV programs into eight distinct categories: TV news programs, TV talk programs, TV

art programs, TV entertainment programs, TV documentaries, TV series, TV movies, and TV special programs. This delineation underscores the multifaceted nature of television programming. This medium disseminates a wide range of content to diverse audiences including entertainment.

TV entertainment programs have evolved into their diverse forms and flexible styles. Zong (2003) through amalgamation with other genres, resulting in the creation of new program formats. This evolution has given rise to a multitude of TV program sub-types within the TV entertainment programs category. These include music entertainment programs, food entertainment programs, and travel entertainment programs. Music TV entertainment programs are a manifestation of modern electronic technology and unique creative expressions within the television medium (Cui, 2010). They seamlessly integrate a wide spectrum of musical elements with diverse forms of entertainment, such as quizzes, games, reality shows, and conversations, to cater to the aesthetic and entertainment preferences of a broader audience (Cui, 2010). There are various definitions exist for the different patterns of TV music programs. For instance, a TV music program was described as a television program built upon the foundational structure of musical performances and song renditions, leveraging TV technology and artistic techniques for production, and subsequently broadcasted on television screens for the audience's appreciation (Li, 2010).

Moreover, certain scholars have offered definitions of music TV programs through the lenses of reality TV or talent shows. Firstly, music reality TV shows are defined as a genre of television programs that prioritize music performance as their central component, utilize reality show formats as their primary mode of expression, and are driven by commercial interests as their primary objective (Zhu, 2014). These programs involve objective documentation and voluntary participation within predefined scenarios, guided by specific game rules or performance protocols. In essence, music reality TV programs represent a comprehensive form of television content that leverages artistic processing, with music as its core dissemination element, aided by the incorporation of reality show conventions through television communication methods (Pan, 2017). Secondly, talent shows are events where participants showcase a wide array of performing arts skills, including singing, dancing, lip-synching, acting, martial arts, instrumental music, poetry, comedy, or other talents (Wikipedia, 2023). Music TV talent shows are television programs where ordinary individuals are invited to demonstrate their musical abilities in accordance with specific selection criteria, with the events being recorded on-site and broadcasted by dedicated production teams (Han, 2015). As a subtype of reality show, music TV talent shows share common characteristics with general reality programs but also exhibit unique traits. For example, regular contestants ultimately ascend to stardom by adhering to the selection criteria on the show. In summary, music TV talent shows is a TV music program that features music related talented amateurs competing for recognition as a performing talent in music disseminated through the utilization of broadcast television and network technology as transmission channels. Music TV talent show is a unique genre that is evolving. This genre has elements of entertainment, music and even reality TV as of today.

Development of Music TV Talent Show in China

Chinese music television talent shows have undergone three stages: the embryonic stage, the developmental stage, and the mature stage. The first stage is the embryonic period. The

origins of music TV talent shows in China can be traced back to the "Young Singer TV Grand Prix," organized by CCTV in 1984. This pioneering competition marked the inception of music competition TV shows in China and has successfully continued for 15 editions up to 2013 (Zhu, 2014).

The second is the developmental period. Following the global success of "American Idol" in 2004, Hunan Satellite TV Station produced "Super Girls," a highly popular music TV talent show (Zhang, 2016). "Super Girls" welcomed participation from female individuals or groups with a passion for singing. This program ran for four seasons, namely 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2016. In 2006, the show achieved remarkable viewership ratings, reaching an impressive 3.188%, a notable feat within the Chinese television landscape (Zhang, 2016). The success of the first season of "Super Girls" served as a catalyst, inspiring other television stations to organize similar music TV talent shows. For instance, the SMG Group launched "My Type My Show" in 2004, followed by "Come on, Good Man" in 2006. The selection and promotional mechanisms employed in "Come on, Good Man" closely mirrored those of "Super Girls." Additionally, in 2005, CCTV and 12 provincial TV stations collaborated to organize the music TV talent show "Dream China" (Pan, 2017).

The third is the mature period. In 2012, "The Voice of China," a collaborative production by Zhejiang Satellite TV and Canxing company, marked the inception of a new wave of music TV talent shows (Wang, 2014). Notably, the second episode of the show attracted significant attention, achieving an impressive viewership rating of 2.88%, securing the top spot on the ratings chart with a decisive lead (Zhang, 2016). Thereafter, the sixth episode achieved even higher ratings, surpassing the 4% mark and earning accolades in the ratings domain (Zhang, 2016). Following the success of "The Voice of China," a proliferation of over 40 music TV programs emerged (Wang, 2014). Concurrently, music TV shows adopted an "overseas model" approach to establish a commanding presence on Chinese television screens, effectively assuming a "dominant screen" posture (Pan, 2017). Nowadays, music talent shows in China are evolving to a deeper level, integrating elements of hip-hop into their formats (Jin, 2020).

The Current State of Music TV Talent Show in China

TV music talent shows are in a peculiar genre. A genre that straddles both the entertainment and music industry. This prompts scholars to study this genre. Some scholars study key stakeholders (celebrities, hosts, and audiences). Some scholars analyze the narrative design and the industrial chain within this genre.

Firstly, music TV talent shows serve essential functions in terms of entertainment and the establishment of music positioning. As this genre is neither pure entertainment genre nor pure music genre, it is imperative to establish a clear and coherent definition for these talent shows (Ji, 2014). Since music is the foundation that TV music talent shows are built upon, music and music artistry should be given the first and vital consideration when producing, reviewing, and evaluating these shows. Although Ji (2014) has emphasized that a fundamental function of TV music talent shows is to provide entertainment to the public, entertainment value of these show comes in at second place. While "The Voice of China" has undergone significant changes in its competition structure and program format in comparison to "Super Girl," it has effectively maintained its thematic essence as an entertainment program (Shen,

2013). This steadfast commitment to entertaining the public aligns with the program's central concept of catering to the general populace (Shen, 2013).

Secondly, several scholarly inquiries have undertaken an examination of the key stakeholders involved in music TV talent shows, including celebrities, hosts, and audiences. Gu (2014) delved into an exploration of the success factors underpinning "The Voice of China," highlighting elements such as its grassroots-oriented, pure music approach, and the incorporation of suspenseful elements that resonated with the audience. Both the mentors and contestants were instrumental in delivering unexpected moments that captivated viewers (Gu, 2014). Xia (2016) embarked on a study focused on the transformational characteristics observed in contemporary Chinese song-based TV programs, tracing their evolution from grassroots talent to mainstream popularity, and from a "grandiose self" image to an emphasis on individuality.

Thirdly, a body of research has undertaken an analysis of the narrative design and industrial chain pertaining to music TV talent shows. Han (2015) employed narratology theories to dissect various narrative elements, including the narrative subject (participants), narrative framework (elimination and selection rules), narrative mode (blending of reality and fiction), and narrative enhancement (column packaging) within music TV talent shows. Wang (2014) examined supply chain associated with music TV talent shows, with a particular focus on advertising revenue. It was highlighted that TV music talent shows should strategically integrate industry value chain resources to ensure effective synergy across all segments of the industry chain (Bi, 2014). The implementation of a production and broadcasting separation system was also noted as a mechanism that enhances the production quality of music TV talent shows (Wang, 2014).

The Problems of Music TV Talent Show in China

While the development and broadcast of music TV talent shows in China have seen notable growth, this study primarily focuses on critical issues within this domain. Specifically, it analyzes two pervasive problems: the problem of program homogeneity with seemingly lack of innovation; and the problem of indiscriminate pursuit of pure economic gains at the expense of artistic integrity.

The primary issue plaguing music TV talent shows in China is a pronounced homogeneity and a conspicuous absence of innovation. Chinese music TV talent shows have largely adhered to a uniform format, exhibiting a marked deficiency in originality (Shen, 2013; Wu, 2015; Liu, 2015). This proclivity for imitation, coupled with the wholesale importation of foreign TV program concepts, has been extensively documented (Shen, 2013; Wu, 2015; Liu, 2015). Furthermore, scholars have highlighted the endemic problem of content duplication and program homogeneity within Chinese music TV talent shows (Han, 2015; Gu, 2014). In response to these pressing concerns, regulatory authorities, notably the State Administration introduced measures known as the "restricted song order" to exert control over singing selection programs (Publicity and Management Department, 2013). This directive prompted various responses from satellite TV stations. For instance, Hunan Satellite TV established a diamond exclusive theater as a strategic move to diversify program formats and mitigate the prevalence of uniformity.

The second prominent issue concerning music TV talent shows pertains to the unchecked pursuit of economic interests, often at the expense of elevated artistic standards. On one hand, scholars have criticized Chinese music TV talent shows for their unbridled pursuit of economic gains, which has led to the propagation of distorted values (Tan, 2014). The commercialization of these shows has been notably excessive, with an imperfect program industry chain (Han, 2015). Furthermore, these shows have strongly catered to the audience's entertainment mentality, effectively succumbing to the forces of entertainment consumption (Gu, 2014). Some scholars have observed a lack of attention to audience needs within Chinese music TV talent shows (Han, 2015). The excessive inclusion of embedded advertisements in these shows has had a detrimental impact on the viewing experience of the audience. Additionally, music TV talent shows have been criticized for their relentless pursuit of high ratings at the expense of social responsibility (Shen, 2013; Liu, 2015). On the other hand, another set of scholars has highlighted issues related to the absence of uniform standards and the perplexing nature of aesthetic criteria within these shows (Pan, 2017). The precise positioning of music or storytelling in music TV talent shows often remains unclear (Gu, 2014). Furthermore, the cultural refinement of talent show content has been deemed lacking (Ji, 2014; Wu, 2015). These programs have been criticized for lacking sophistication in style and occasionally veering towards the ostentatious and kitschy (Cui, 2010), often exhibiting evident traces of superficial packaging and a dearth of authentic emotional depth (Zhu, 2014).

The Future Trend of Music TV Talent Show in China

The development trend of TV music talent shows should be driven by a people-centered approach to program creation; with a strong emphasis on innovation and incorporation of emerging technologies into their productions. First and foremost, the development of music TV talent shows should revolve around a people-centered approach to program creation. The content of TV music talent shows inherently centers around people and their talents (Liu, 2015) and should cater to the diverse and distinct needs of audiences (Tan, 2014). TV producers are urged to reevaluate audience preferences and curate varied styles of music TV talent shows tailored to different viewer demographics (Bi, 2014). Music TV talent shows should not only entertain but also aim to refine the audience's musical aesthetic sensibilities and appreciation. Furthermore, it should provide a platform for folk singers to showcase their musical prowess. Artists, as creators, are encouraged to recognize that their craft is central to their existence, and they must commit to excellence in their creative endeavors, offering the finest intellectual nourishment to the public (Xinhuanet, 2016). To cater to the diverse, multilayered, and high-quality viewing needs of audiences in China, through regulatory implementation, the SAPPFT (2011) issued guidelines to regulate the TV satellite integrated channel programs (Xinhua News Agency, 2011). These directives advocated an increase in the broadcasting of news programs and censoring specific types of TV programs; to mitigate excessive entertainment and the propagation of vulgar content. Zhu (2014) recommended the preservation of humanistic values in the content of TV music programs as they fulfill ordinary people's aspirations. Nevertheless, the production of TV music talent shows should uphold the responsibilities and objectives of music media (Chen, 2014). Promotion of correct values (Han, 2015), local culture (Tan, 2014) and regional culture (Ji, 2014) as well as fairness and impartiality (Chen, 2014) should also be upheld in these competitions. It is important to strike a balance between genuine ("true") and theatrical ("show") in stage performances too (Tan, 2014). Eventually, the key components of TV music talent shows, the star hosts, should undergo training (Gu, 2014) to achieve the objectives of the music media as well as to enhance

the quality and appeal of hosts in TV music talent shows.

Secondly, music TV talent shows started off as an innovative form of TV music program in its infancy and should continue to be the forefront of TV program production in innovation. This genre is a fertile environment for the creators, producers as well as production teams to innovate and be creative in their television programming. Furthermore, various entertainment elements (Zhang, 2016) are available for the picking. TV music program producers have embraced a path of profound specialization within the field. They meticulously planning and preparing their program content with specific vertical segments. This vertical subdivision of content creation resulting in the production of high-quality programs. By delving deep into niche cultures (Jin, 2020) as well as local and regional cultures (Ji, 2014), the production teams extend these cultures beyond their conventional boundaries. This is innovation. In pursuit of innovation, the SAPPRT has issued a directive titled "Notice on Vigorously Promoting Independent Innovation of Radio and TV Programs." This notice supports fostering independent innovation and at the same time stressed the importance of model management, adhering to the 920 Schedule, and implementing support policies outlined by the General Administration. This is a clear indication of the SAPPRT commitment to support original program models and curb the proliferation of exorbitant copyright acquisition costs (People's Government of Beijing Municipal, 2016).

Thirdly, the producers of this genre should incorporate the use emerging technologies to disseminate their shows. Television stations are increasingly leveraging new media platforms for integrated marketing efforts, thereby extending the industry chain development of music TV talent shows (Zhang, 2016). The brand management of TV music talent shows should integrate these network multimedia resources to reach their audiences (Gu, 2014). The Chinese National Radio and Television Administration has announced plans to expedite the enhancement of technical specifications in smart broadcasting and television programs (Planning and Finance Division, 2021). This initiative aims to foster innovation in program content and engage in proactive research on new audio-visual technologies, including ultra-high-definition video, three-dimensional sound, VR, AR, MR, 360° panoramic video, and holographic imaging. The objective is to establish comprehensive technical systems encompassing the production, storage, broadcast, distribution, and presentation of new audio-visual programs. The government is also actively promoting the widespread integration and application of cutting-edge information technology, such as cloud computing, big data, Internet technology, Blockchain, IPv6, artificial intelligence, and 5G, within the radio and television industry. This drive seeks to facilitate the development, deployment, comprehensive utilization, and mutual application of original and key core common technologies in the radio and television sector (National Radio and Television Administration, 2021).

Conclusion

This paper has explored the research on music television talent shows, first of all, the definition of music television talent shows, and then analyzed its current situation, history, problems and future development in China. This study helps researchers study music television talent shows, while increasing international scholars' understanding of Chinese music television talent shows.

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