Exploring the past to navigate the future: Examining histories of higher dance education in China in an internationalized context

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China has a rich history of dance education and has established prominent tertiary dance institutions. Coupled with this is a growing interest globally to engage with China, and connections are developing between Chinese and non-Chinese tertiary dance institutions. Within this internationalization of dance education there is the potential for authentic and exciting dialogue and exchange to occur. However, to perhaps allow such interactions to be most beneficial for all involved it is of interest to look at the past to navigate the present and the future. Therefore, this article seeks to critically examine histories of higher dance education in China, to then provide critical understandings of higher dance education in China in the present and how these histories might inform the future. Within this there is a purposeful focus on the meanings of dance education in China, the relationship between politics and dance, and the examination-orientated education philosophies in teaching and learning dance.

Keywords: China; dance; education; history; internationalization

Introduction

International mobility in higher education is increasing (Altbach 2001; Altbach & Knight 2007; Huang 2003), and simultaneously transnational education is growing (UNESCO 2016). It is acknowledged that importing and exporting education, and the internationalization of higher education is not a new phenomenon (Adams 2007; Willis 2008). Within this dance education is not excluded from such international development, dialogue and exchange (Martin 2012, 2013).

In contemporary international education China is often viewed as one of the world's most promising markets, with bilateral agreements for international cooperation and education services increasing connections between Chinese and non-Chinese institutions (Hou, Montgomery & McDowell 2014; Willis 2006). Diverse government policy directives to engage with China in various ways are motivating universities to establish and maintain relationships with Chinese institutions (Australia-China Relations Institute 2015; New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2015; Research Council UK-China 2014). In higher dance education this has resulted in dual degree programmes, research collaborations, and teaching and student

exchanges[1]. Concurrently the Chinese government is looking towards global trends and ideas that might strengthen and advance higher education in China (Ministry of Education of China 2002, 2009, 2014).

Within the context of internationalized education it can be understood that this has never been a one-way process (Huang 2003). While insitutions are responding to internationalization in various ways, students themselves are also encountering education in an incresingly complex global world and education market. In 2013 over 4.1 million students studied abroad (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2016). Within this context Chinese students are frequently traveling abroad to gain tertiary education. Of all student groups Chinese students appear to be the most mobile, with 712,157 Chinese students studying abroad in 2013 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2016). Students are studying abroad for a variety of reasons, they have varied experiences and they often negotiate social, cultural and educational challenges within this process (Lu, Mavondo & Qiu 2009; Martin 2012, 2013). Those that study dance abroad often face similar issues to those studying other disciplines abroad, but it has been noted that there are unique challenges that could be viewed as specific for dance (Martin 2012).

Within this complex landscape of international higher dance education when engaging with a Chinese context and working with Chinese students who may be studying dance abroad, there is the potential to "absorb the past in order to understand the present and inform the future" (Lamond 2005, 1273). The desire to use the lens of history to better understand the present and future, and disseminate this through a scholarly article stems from personal experiences of working between tertiary dance institutions in China and abroad, and queries such as: how well might non-Chinese dance institutions seeking to engage with Chinese dance institutions understand the nuances of Chinese dance education systems and structures? How might understanding particular characteristics of Chinese dance education inform how Chinese dance students studying abroad are taught in the most culturally relevant and responsive way? And how might the reflection on elements of Chinese dance education allow those teaching and learning dance in contemporary China to critically examine and make conscious choices about directions for dance education in the future?

This article delves into key ideas within the history of dance education in China to then propose how these histories might influence and effect the futures of dance education in China. An extensive array of literature and policies have been explored surrounding arguments and

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[1] International dual degree programmes in dance include the Beijing Dance Academy and University of Auckland's Master of Dance Education / Master of Community Dance. Research collaborations include research exchanges, collaborations, publications and symposiums between University of Auckland and Beijing Dance Academy, Brigham Young University and Beijing Dance Academy, NYU Steinhardt and Beijing Normal University, and the Centre for Research into the Performing Arts (ResCen) at Middlesex Arts Cross Collaboration with Beijing Dance Academy and Taipei National University of the Arts. Teaching and student exchanges include the China Dancer's Association programmes with teachers from Dance Studies at the University of Auckland and Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, and Beijing Dance Academy and SUNY Purchase College and Unitec Institute of Technology.

theories related to dance education and development in China. Much of the literature reviewed is from Chinese scholarly publications and has therefore been translated into English for the purposes of this article. It is important to acknowledge that within any translation process there is the potential for meanings to be lost and for mistakes to be made. The authors have sought to carefully consider these translations, working to balance both the integrity of the meanings held in the quotes and ideas, while also sustaining clarity of the writing for ease of reading. From the extensive review of literature three key areas emerged. The authors have then connected these three areas to how international dance education in and with China might develop, and how Chinese dance students studying abroad (and the teachers teaching them, and the institutions hosting them) might negotiate challenges within the learning process. They are: the meanings of dance in China; the relationship between politics and dance education; and, examination-orientated education philosophies in dance teaching and learning.

It can be acknowledged that Chinese history is vast and within this dance is woven through this past in various ways (Li Chang & Frederiksen 2016). The authors do not seek to encapsulate this entire history, rather they intend to draw on relevant aspects in relation to further understanding parts of Chinese higher dance education today and where it might extend to in the future, with a keen eye toward how internationalization might be navigated with sensitivity, care and relevance.

The meanings of dance in China

> *The studio was abuzz with discussion. Groups of dancers clustered on the floor deep in debate about the short choreographic works they had just shared with each other. I walked over to one of the clusters and knelt down to hear the conversation. My translator sat next to me, drip-feeding highlights of the points made by the dancers. There was talk of the motivations and ideas behind some of the movement, a few points made about how to play with choreographic structure, and the question of 'what is creativity?' emerged. I thought that is was all going wonderfully. The focus of the week of classes I had been teaching was on generating individual movement languages and exploring personal choreographic signatures, and the conversation seemed to reveal that they really 'got it'. Just as I was about to stand to leave and join another group one of the dancers asked me a question quite directly. The translator turned to me and said, "he'd like to know if he could have some feedback on his technique, was his dancing good? He says because that's the most important thing". In that moment I realised that there was a mismatch between my understanding of what it was important to consider in creating dance, and the understanding of some of those in the room.*

The narrative above, shared by [author], was from the summer of 2015 when she was invited to teach a weeklong workshop as part of the China Dancer's Associations National Youth Dance Development programme in Beijing. It was not [the author's] first time teaching in a Chinese context, but it was the first time that she was confronted with a very clear divergence of meanings of dance. Dance can have a variety of meanings in a multiplicity of contexts, with these shifting and evolving over time in relation to social, political, economic and cultural changes (Buckland 1999; Sparshott 1995). These diverse meanings in turn can contribute to how dance has been valued in histories, is valued within contemporary societies, and may be valued in various futures. This article does not seek to provide a single definition of dance within a Chinese context, however it does seek to explore the meanings of dance that have existed at various times in China, and in turn how such meanings might allow understandings of the present and future directions of higher dance education in China.

The word 'dance' in Chinese is 'wudao'(舞蹈), with 'wu' meaning rotation and tempo and 'dao' meaning step (Yuan 1994, 2007). The early documentation of dance in China is mostly associated with religious rites and scared ceremonies (Jiang 2008; Yang 2013). Within the context of early ancient China, dance was viewed as an informal art form that revealed strong human emotion (Wang 1980; Yuan 2004).

When a Feudalist society (221 BC - 1911 AD)[2] was established in China, dance became a practice appreciated by many levels of society (Yang 2013). In the Han dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD), the central government founded the Imperial Music Bureau (Yuefu) to collect music, poetry, dance that existed in China, while simultaneously being directed to develop these arts forms (Deng 2013; Liao 2005). Today, there is still debate about the original purpose of establishing the Yuefu, and questions have been raised over whether the purpose was to centralize cultural practices and activities, entertain the royal classes, or record the arts practices in rural regions of China (Liao 2005). Chinese scholars acknowledge that Yuefu played a significant role in shifting participation in music, poetry and dance "from self-pleasure to pleasing others" (Peng 2003, 56), and within this period of time the occupation of 'dancer' emerged (Peng & Yu 1991). The influence of Yuefu lasted until the end of the Tang dynasty (618 -907 AD). It could be said that in the history of China, dance was considered as a kind of performing art form to be performed by specific types of people who receive particular dance training.

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2 Feudalism (Fengjian system) in the context of China usually refers to a structure where a region or piece of land is allocated to an individual, establishing him as the ruler of that region. It also describes a decentralized political system where the ruler shares power with local lords. There is some debate over the exact time of when the Feudalism started or ended in China. According to the Chinese Marxists histories, the hypothetical feudalism symbolizes the beginning of feudal stage in Chinese history, which continued until the fall of the Qin dynasty. Marxist historians in China have described Chinese ancient society as largely feudal.

After the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Chinese dance educator Wu Xiaobang[3] played a significant role in the foundation and development of dance education in China. Wu (1952, 1982, 1992) made three definitions of 'dance' and these have provided the foundation for building the current dance education system in China. In his book *An introduction to dance,* Wu (1952) firstly defined that,

> [d]ance is the art of movements. Based on the image of movements of the human body, it analyzes the natural or social phenomena of movements through natural or social laws of movements to display different formalized movements. These kinds of movements, no matter if they are expressing the thoughts and feelings of an individual or a group of people, is called dance (39).

Wu mentions 'movements' six times in the above definition, and it appears that the 1952 definition makes a clear articulation that dance is the art of movement. Thirty years later, Wu (1982) described dance again in his book *A New Brief Introduction to Dance Art*, articulating that,

> [d]ance is the art of body movements. All movements can be called dance, once through the choreographers' observation, experience and analysis of natural and social life are organized, reflect distinctive characters and stories and use ingenious techniques, expressing the life, thoughts and feelings of an individual or a group of people (6).

In 1992, Wu defined 'dance' for the third time when he joined a team of scholars to edit the *Chinese Encyclopedia: Music and Dance.* In this book he noted that,

> [a]ccording to its nature, dance is the art of body movement. Generally speaking, all that expresses people's feelings by organized and regular body movements can be called dance. But as an art that is performed on the stage, dance reflects people, events, thoughts and feelings in brief and typical movements and distinctive images based on the choreographers' observation, experience and analysis of nature and society (287).

According to Lu (2010, 2014), Wu's definitions are perhaps influenced by his experiences with the work of Rudolf Laban and Mary Wigman. It has been acknowledged that Laban and Wigman thought highly of the expression of dance and held critical attitudes toward mimesis (Lu 2000). The definitions provided by Wu acknowledge the importance of movement and emphasize the relationship between movement and expression. Within Wu's second and third

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[3] Wu Xiaobang (1906-1995), known as "the father of Chinese dance" (Wilcox 2016), is considered a pioneer of modern dance in 20th century China. From 1929 - 1936 Wu went to Japan to learn ballet and Mary Wigman's expressionistic modern dance at the Takada Masao Dance Institution and the Eguchi Takaya and Misako Miya Modern Dance Institute. The exposure to German and American modern dance and ballet led Wu to devote his life to promote dance for the use of patriotic and leftist political causes, as well as extensive documentation and study of Chinese religious and folk dance (Wilcox 2016).

definitions, he used words such as ‘choreographers’ and ‘techniques’, which provide a leaning towards professional dance training. As Lu (2000) pointed out, Wu’s highlighting of movements shifted Chinese dance scholar’s views, which often only considered dance as the accessory of music and Chinese opera.

It can be seen from the above discussion that although there are broad understandings of the meanings of dance within a Chinese context, with movement often noted as an important characteristic, as is the notion of a certain type of person being considered a ‘dancer’. When we place dance in present day higher education in China, the questions could be asked: does dance education only mean focusing on teaching movement? How do these meanings from history place value on who is considered to be a dancer and in turn who might be able to receive dance education? And how might the past representations of dance in a Chinese context inform contemporary institutions and curriculums? When looking at how these past meanings might connect to how international dance education in and with China might develop, the following queries emerge: how might these past meanings challenge or reinforce other cultural meanings of dance? How might there be ‘culture shock’ or ‘study shock’ when shifting between different tertiary dance locations (geographically, culturally and institutionally) that hold different meanings of dance? And how might these diverse meanings create challenges and opportunities when engaging in international dance education in and with China?

The various meanings of dance that have developed within a Chinese context have resulted in certain aspects being valued more than others. It is apparent that today dance is perceived as a formal practice and art, not necessarily something that is accessible for all in China. While this is by no means a phenomenon limited to a Chinese context, it has led to higher dance education in China focusing developing high standards of technical competency, placing an emphasis on performance. Other facets of dance (the creative, educative and theoretical components in particular) have been given less attention. However there appear to be small shifts occurring, particularly through recent government policies and institutional practices that reflect a more holistic view of what dance might be and how it might contribute to Chinese art and wider society (see for example: Ministry of Education of China 2014). As a result some tertiary dance institutions in China are engaging in reform and deliberate practices to address such policies (for example the recent re-structuring and international engagements at Beijing Dance Academy). In relation to international engagement between tertiary dance institutions in China and abroad, and international exchanges and collaborations between individuals from a Chinese and non-Chinese context working together, these meanings can be taken into consideration. It is perhaps inevitable that despite planning, sensitivities and consideration, mistakes can be made and meanings can be misinterpreted within cross-cultural encounters. However, through understanding the background of where these meanings have emerged from, it may allow us to engage in a relationship with more empathy and awareness.

The relationship between politics and dance education

> *It was 9am and Professor Lu[4] and I stood at the front of the dance studio in Public School 89, New York City. We had arrived from Beijing the night before, and this was our first day observing dance classes in the United States. The jet lag loomed over us, and I was finding it hard to believe that I was in the 'Big Apple'. The dance teacher arrived to greet us. After formalities and introductions, she told us that the class we would watch was for first grade children, and it would be their third dance class of the semester. The teacher went on to say that in today's class she would let students do their own choreography. "Choreography?" I asked. I thought I might have heard incorrectly. The teacher replied, "Yes, choreography. Each group will make their own dance piece". I was in complete shock when I heard her words. For me, as someone who trained in a Chinese dance education setting, I never thought that I could become a choreographer, let alone that first grade students could be choreographers. In a Chinese context, it is nearly always perceived that the choreographer must be someone who has many years of professional training in dance, and is considered to be very talented in this area by professional standards. From what I had observed and experienced in China, I thought the requirements for being a choreographer were even more rigours than being a dancer, as a choreographer should not only good at dancing, but also have exceptional skills in the tools and techniques of how to make dance works. However, the dance teacher who was standing in front of us just said that she would let kids who were only seven years old create their own dance works. She treated all of the children in her class as choreographers!*

It has been four years since the author, [name], had this experience in New York City with Professor Lu. She still remembers the details of this encounter with clarity, and the dance class at the Public School 89 is etched in her memory. Standing in the dance studio of Public School 89 [the author] came to the realisation that in looking beyond technique and thousands of hours of practices in the studio, there was a vast dance world waiting to be explored. This transformative moment the author experienced was facilitated through a Chinese government funded and initiated project, entitled Quality Oriented Dance Education, and was led by Professor Lu Yisheng from 2011 – 2014. This project was not unusual in the sense that the Chinese government tends to fund the majority of all dance related research occurring in the country. The Chinese government encouraged the engagement with foreign models of dance education, and research trips such as the one noted above by [author], as combining educational

[4] Professor Lu is …. [add a brief overview of who Prof. Lu is, and why his work in dance education is significant in China]

resources from both 'Eastern' and 'Western' to foster what is termed 'Quality Education' in China is a core focus of the educational policies within the Chinese government (Dello-Iacovo 2009). This project recalled by the author is just one small snapshot of how dance and politics have been interacting within a Chinese context.

The relationship between dance and politics is by no means unusual (Franko 2006; Martin 1998). Globally it can be acknowledged that there have been, and continue to be, connections of dance to governmental, state and party politics, war, nationalism, activism, terrorism, human rights, political ideologies and cultural policy (Giersdorf 2015; Prickett 2013). Within a Chinese context the framework of a socialist republic has resulted in a unique relationship between dance and politics. Issues such as government regulated censorship (and subsequent self-censorship) and limitations on freedom of speech permeate arts and education in a Chinese context[5] (MacKinnon 2008; Xu, 2014), and political agendas have shaped higher dance education in China (Jin 2016).

It has been acknowledged that Chinese political agendas in formation of the People's Republic of China motivated the emergence of modern dance education in China (Deng 2013; Feng 2014). After the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the main aim of China's socialist education was to "enable everyone who receives and education to develop morally, intellectually, and physically and to become a worker with both a socialist consciousness and culture" (Zhou, 1985, 190). According to Huo (2015), the beginning of 'new China'[6] was strongly influenced by socialism developed in the Soviet Union. China's reliance on the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R) was exacerbated by hostile relations with Western countries post-World War II and the desire to reject interactions with states deemed to be 'imperialist' (Chang 1990). Huo (2015) notes that the construction and development of China was heavily informed by "learning from the Soviet Union" (7), and dance education was no exception (Huo 2015; Liao 2006; Lu 2000; Yu 2001). In 1954, the Soviet Union sent dance experts (such as P.A. Gusev, who is known as the 'father of Chinese ballet') to China and helped to establish the first state sponsored dance school in China (Beijing Dance School, the predecessor of the Beijing Dance Academy). From this point it can be understood that the Soviet Union model of dance education influenced the development of all levels of dance education in China for more than half a century (Liao 2006; Lu 2012; Deng 2014). Within this it is of interest to note that while the relationship between China and the Soviet Union had initially

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[5] Censorship has a long history in China (Steele 2009), and the practice of censoring articles, books, art works, films, music, dance, theatre, television and Internet content from the public sphere in China is clearly embedded in society and is considered to be widespread (Landia 2014). Within this it has been noted that "contemporary Chinese artists have long been marginalized in China as their ideas conflict with the mainstream political ideology" (Zhang 2014, 827). Self-censorship referes to a technique used by most artists, performers, institutions, writers, newsrooms and directors around the world to try to avoid measures and censorship by political authorities (Landia 2014).

[6] New China (1949 - present), as opposed to the imperial China, Chinese people view the foundation of the People's Republic of China as the beginning of the New China.

been mutually supportive, disagreements arose, particularly after the death of Joseph Stalin, and by 1963, the Chinese Communist Party began to openly denounce the Soviet Union.

During the early establishment of the People's Republic of China the Soviet Union's socialist educational system became a source of stimulation for developing Chinese education systems, curriculums and pedagogies (Gu 2004). Soviet educator Kaiov deeply influenced Chinese education with his emphasis of 'subject-oriented', 'classroom-oriented' and 'teacher-oriented' education (Liao 2006; Liu & Lin 2008; Huo 2015). Through applying Marxist principles within pedagogy, Kaiov's educational theories were viewed as the model for a socialist countries' cultivation (Liu & Lin 2008). Introduced in the 1950s, Kaiov's educational theories have gradually become the "standard paradigm for China's pedagogy" (Liu & Lin 2008, 166). With the wide reaching influence of Kaiov, dance education in China has held onto strong characteristics of the Soviet model of dance education, even moving in to the 21st century (Deng & Yang 2012).

The motivation to develop dance in China, through the establishment of the Beijing Dance School in 1954, was driven by the design to remedy the perceived shortage of arts practitioners as a result of the long periods of war in China (the Second World War 1937-1945, and the Chinese Civil War 1945-1949). A key responsibility for the Beijing Dance School was to cultivate high quality dancers and choreographers for local and national dance companies (Rowe, Buck & Martin 2014; Zhao 2009). Under the influence of Soviet ballet training models and the goal of pursuing excellence within a professional dance context, the Beijing Dance School was formed. Approved by the Ministry of Education in China in 1978, the Beijing Dance School started to recruit undergraduate students and officially changed its name to Beijing Dance Academy (Deng 2012; Lu 2000). It can be acknowledged that the Beijing Dance Academy has been and currently is the single most influential dance education organization in China, with other tertiary dance institutions following Beijing Dance Academy's structure and focus.

It can be observed that trends toward a global diffusion of educational policies are gathering momentum in Chinese education contexts, and inclusive of this is tertiary dance education. It can be noted that as this occurs care can be taken to carefully understand the cultural context from which policies and practices are being borrowed and into which they will be implemented (Cheng 1998). Within the unique political context of China ideas that might be effective in another cultural context may not work in a Chinese context. Restrictions surrounding Internet access, language, the ability to have complete democratic freedom of speech, and the censorship that occurs in and through dance, place specific challenges around how a simple 'copy and paste' of educational ideas and models from abroad, or a synthesis of what is seen abroad with what is occurring in China, might be effective. Within all of this it is perhaps the individual imagination within the nexus of dance education and politics that is possibly the most radical

thing in China. It is potentially the foundations being paved today, and ideas of the next generation of dance educators, that might contain the seeds of innovative, imaginative and culturally relevant ways in which tertiary dance education in China, and international engagement with Chinese tertiary dance, might flourish in the future.

Through exploring this relatively recent history of dance and politics in China, it can be observed that many of the present day developments of dance education at tertiary level have been influenced by political agendas and support. The challenge when then engaging in international education in this context is that different political agendas have to be negotiated to work together in different ways.

Examination-oriented education philosophies in dance teaching and learning

> *I sat opposite Changying for our fourth supervision meeting. Changying looked concerned, her brow furrowed and eyes lowered at the notebook in front of her. It was the third month of Changying's one year Master's degree, and she was yet to produce a piece of writing. My colleague and I, who were supervising her Master's journey, had together with Changying set a clear timeline, with key dates and landmark moments, in the first weeks of her Master's. Changying had met with us weekly, but each week told us that she had no writing to share. We offered readings, set writing tasks, introduced her to other Master's students, asked questions and what she needed from us to enable her to move forward. But, we were stuck. As my colleague and I prompted discussion about her research it was apparent that Changying was getting more worried with every word we were saying. I looked over to my colleague and his eyes met mine, there was supervisory telepathy that told us to "back off". I handed over the conversation to Changying, asking her "what do you think are the challenges here?". She looked up from her notebook and began to speak. "I feel confused about why I need to write, my thesis is not due for nine months". Changying paused, my colleague and I left the empty space silent, and she continued. "In China I would study very hard and memorise the material for a week before the exam and get vey good marks. I think I work best that way, so I thought I would do the same for my thesis. I like the pressure, it makes me a good student".*

The above encounter, experienced by [author's name], allowed her to finally make sense of why there had been such struggles over the previous months to gain writing from Changying. The challenge from this point was how to shift Changying's disposition from being focused on rote learning for a single examination outcome, to being inclined to see the process of learning requiring consistent practice, engagement and reflection, to be just as valuable as the final outcome. Changying's experience is perhaps reflective of other students' encounters when

moving between different educational paradigms, and raises questions around how Chinese examination-oriented education philosophies influence dance teaching and learning?

For many decades there has been debate and critique of examination-oriented education globally (Kwok 2004; Yuan-kun 2001; Zhang 2016; Zhong 2006), and within higher education, particularly in a Chinese context, this discussion has been significant (Fengzhen 2002). In China examination-orientated education philosophies have been entrenched as core processes for measuring student learning (Chen 2015). Such practices have also impacted on assessment modes and methods within Chinese higher dance education.

It has been clearly documented that the examination-oriented education system in China has had strong influences on curriculum, pedagogy, content and values at all levels of education in the country (Min & Xiuwen 2001). It is well known that the examination-oriented education system (teaching for examination and learning for examination) has a long history in Chinese cultural and society (Dello-Iacovo 2008; Starr 2012; Zhong 2006). According to Starr (2012), due to the hierarchical pedagogical system in the history of China, examination has been viewed as the "route to acquiring membership of the elite group in society" (10). Examination has often been regarded as the only method to evaluate the efficiency of teachers' teaching and students' learning. As Qi (2004) states, "students who have succeeded climbing high up the educational ladder are those who have passed various competitive examinations, such as the National College/University Entrance Examination (Chinese Gaokao)" (26). As a key connection between basic and higher education, Gaokao guides teaching and learning in elementary and secondary schools and selects capable individuals for higher education. The significance of Gaokao within the education system has, for many years, guided the teaching and learning not only in the lead up to the Gaokao examination, but also the teaching and learning post-gaokao (Liu & Wu 2006).

Within contemporary history in China society has begun to realize that it is more commonplace that students who are selected by examinations appear to have "high scores but poor competence" (Qu 2014, 202). This resulted in the central government raising the concept of 'quality-oriented education' in the 1990's, which aimed to shift the strong negative perceptions of the examination-oriented education, rather offering a more holistic style of education and assessment (Dello-lacovo, 2009). The impact of implementing 'quality-oriented education' in China is still controversial and the impact over the past 30 years is still unknown (Chi 2016; Dello-lacovo 2009; Tian 2015). As many scholars argue, due to the unchanging requirements and criteria for getting into higher level of education, achieving higher scores on the examination is still the key focus for teaching and learning activities in schools (Dello-lacovo 2009). Promoting 'quality-oriented education' did not change the mechanism and criteria for getting into good high schools or universities. Under these circumstances, school principals, parents, and even students themselves choose to ignore arts education since these courses would

not be tested as academic subjects in the entrance examinations, such as the Senior Entrance Exam and National College Entrance Examination (Zhou et al. 2013). At the same time, because of the preferential policy for 'students with special talents'[7], arts education at compulsory level education became a kind of professional training for specific groups of students (Liu 2013; Yu 2005), which continues to echo Gardner's observations about the focus upon skill building and technique oriented teaching of the arts in Chinese schools. It is to be acknowledged that examinations have played a pivotal role in the education system, shaping pedagogical practice, regardless of the discipline being taught (Davey, De Lian & Higgins 2007).

Some scholars have noted that as China looks to shift its educational practices, and within this the idea of examination-oriented education, there has been significant borrowing of theories and 'best practices' from elsewhere, with it being articulated that "a North–South trend in policy transfer is clearly discernible" (Tan, 2016, 195). Within this transfer a mere copy-paste is not occurring, rather the borrowed policies are mediated and moderated by the ideological attitude of the Chinese educational stakeholders, stemming from the notion of 'theory ladenness' within an exam-oriented paradigm.

Conclusion

The use the lens of history to better understand the history, it is also argued, should allow students to make better sense of their social life (Blanco & Rosa 1997)
To appreciate this distinction, it is useful to understand that the current debate has progressed through several discrete stages.

Infused with politics and shaped by history

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[7] The term 'students with special talents' usually refers to students who specialized on particular aspects of arts or sports, such as music, dance, drawing, playing football or basketball. In China, since the late 90's, there had been a "fast track" for Chinese students with special talent to get into top universities' art troupes or sports team could be admitted with a low threshold of 30 to 60 points lower than the minimum admission Gaokao score (Yu & Zou 2005). Therefore, in order to get into good schools or universities, parents usually sent children to interest-oriented classes to learn these skills very early.

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