

**AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ON
DIAOHUA CHANG**

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AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ON DIAOHUA CHANG

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AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ON DIAOHUA CHANG

ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on an autoethnographical account of *Diaohua Chang* in Kuala Lumpur with a case study at three nightclubs. *Diaohua Chang* is a live-singing performance of Chinese popular songs common to venues such as open-air food court and night clubs. The present research studied *Diaohua Chang* at nightclub setting. The selected nightclubs host *Diaohua Chang*, a live singing performance on a stage in a Karaoke Pub setting. There is a serious lack of studies on *Diaohua Chang*. Related past literature such as Tan (1984), Chang (2014) and Chin (2015) described the cultural elements of the sing-song performances of *Getai* and *Hua Chang*, however most are from an outsider perspective. In this study, the author explored the very much female dominated *Diaohua Chang* from an insider and male perspective in an auto-ethnographical tradition. This dissertation aims to provide a holistic view and discussion on *Diaohua Chang* and its social and gender issues with a self-reflexive account of the author's participant observation at the field.

Keywords: *Diaohua Chang*, Chinese, Sing-song, and Autoethnography.

AUTOETHNOGRAFI DIAOHUA CHANG

ABSTRAK

Disertasi ini adalah sebuah autoethnografi *Diaohua Chang*. *Diaohua Chang* merupakan satu persembahan nyanyian lagu pop Cina secara langsung di tempat seperti ‘food court’ dan kelab malam. Kajian ini bertumpu pada tiga kelab malam, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, yang merupakan sebuah pusat hiburan bertemakan Karaoke Pub di mana persembahan *Diaohua Chang* diadakan secara langsung di atas pentas. Sejak dulu, persembahan *Diaohua Chang* adalah didominasi oleh penyanyi wanita. Akan tetapi, perubahan telah berlaku. Oleh demikian, kajian perlu dilaksanakan. Kajian literatur yang merangkumi kajian *Diaohua Chang* adalah amat berkurangan. Kajian lepas seperti Tan (1984), Chang (2014) and Chin (2015) membawa deskripsi budaya persembahan menyanyi seperti di Kotai dan *Hua Chang* hanya menyentuh pada perspektif etic semata-mata. Oleh itu, objektif disertasi ini adalah untuk menganalisis dan membincangkan isu sosial serta jantina dalam persembahan *Diaohua Chang* serta kajian yang lebih menekankan perspektif emic.

Kata Kunci: *Diaohua Chang*, Cina, Menyanyi, Lagu, dan autoethnografi.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis examined *Diaohua Chang* or literally translated as ‘Flower Wreath Field,’ a female dominated singing performance with male-dominated audience that is popular among some Malaysian Chinese community. The label with ‘flower’ originates from the audience appreciation gesture of hanging paid flower wreath around the singer’s neck where the singers receive extra payment. The study was carried out in the context of autoethnography, where the author’s reflexive account as an insider was analysed. Three nightclubs were selected in this study where the names of the nightclubs were made anonymous in this report due to illegal issues surrounding the business of *Diaohua Chang*. In this investigation, *Diaohua Chang* in the form of a karaoke event where the hired karaoke singers perform in a group or as a solo with audience actively participate as reviewers in selecting their favourite performers via hanging flower wreath to them. Thus, this drives the researcher intention to further investigate the functions of *Diaohua Chang* as a musical and cultural practice and the study of human behavior in a nightclub setting. The music-making process underscore the importance as a local tradition for the Malaysian Chinese scenario.

1.2 Background of Study

Malaysia has different races and religions and the multiracial components of Malays, Chinese, Indians and other minorities ethnic live in a country with different cultures and practices (Miller, 2018). The country has 13 states and three federal territories which composed of two noncontiguous regions; Peninsular Malaysia and West Malaysia (Ooi, Lockard, Leinbach, & Ahmad, 2018). Malaysia is part of Southeast Asia, which comprised of the countries of Brunei, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Singapore, Philippines, Timor-Leste, and Indonesia. Malaysia and Singapore are among the Southeast Asia countries which hold as the members of the Commonwealth of Nation; represent the political marriage of territories that were formerly under British rule (Ooi *et al.*, 2018). Kuala Lumpur is Malaysia's capital city and the largest city in Malaysia. The official and national language of this country are Bahasa Melayu while Islam is their official religion.

According to Department of Statistics Malaysia (2015), the country consists of a multiracial population with 67.4% Bumiputera (consisting of Malay and indigenous group), 24.6% Chinese, 7.3% Indians and another 0.7% of other ethnic groups. The Chinese, had a history back to the 15th century where migrant Chinese mostly from the Southern part of China sets foot in Malaysia (West, 2010). Although the Chinese is not the majority ethnic group in Malaysia, however, their presence in the local music scene has brought in tradition from China and the outcome of syncretic music appeared where the influence from Malay and neighbouring countries such as Thailand occur.

The traditional Chinese performing arts that were brought into Malaysia are such as Cantonese opera, Teochew opera, while the intermarriage between Chinese and Malay in Melaka, that led to the community of *Peranakan* brought in new musical genre such as

Dondang Sayang (see Matusky & Tan, 2017). Modernized traditional Chinese musical form that took on the temporary stage such as *Ko-tai* was also popular in the 60s where it showcased a mixture of traditional and modernized music and theatrical performance with popular songs (Tan, 1984). *Ko-tai* or (Song stage) may not have a larger market value compared to recordings, however, was popular until today within some communities. Among these, one that captures the market, especially male-audience, is the *Diaohua Chang*.

At the beginning, it was given the name *Hua Chang* or *Flower Field* as the general term for *Diaohua Chang*. However, it caused confusion for many people because the word *hua* or flower and *chang* or field may bring the meaning of a florist or flower field. Thus, the name *Diaohua Chang*, that has an added verb *diao* or hanging, was found more appropriate within the *Hua Chang* communities as it signifies the act of ‘hanging flower wreath’ as a support given by the customers. The object flower, in this field, does not mean the fresh flowers, but artificial flowers garland. As defined by Chin (2015), *Diaohua Chang* is a place which involves stage performances by mostly young female performers where audience bought the flower-like wreath for their favourite performers as a kind of appreciation of their performances. It is noted that the local *Diaohua Chang* setting and practice reveals some similarities in with the *Flower Field* in Thailand. Both of the places will pay flower-like wreath to their favourite singers as an act of appreciation. However, the origin of this whether it is from Malaysia or Thai remain unknown.

1.3 Problem Statement

There are a few issues this study attempts to investigate that are missing in past literatures. Firstly, the question of why this musical culture is popular among some local Chinese community as part of their nightly entertainment was explored in this study. The meaning and function of *Diaohua Chang* will be defined. Besides, this study questioned the role of *Diaohua Chang* and its male-centric audience, where male guests form the dominant group of audience that patronage the singing performances. Moreover, the researcher also attempts to cover sensitive issues surrounding the *Diaohua Chang*, a sing-song performance of Chinese popular music, by identifying social problems such as prostitutes, drugs, illegal alcohol trade.

Thus, as the researcher problematized the *Diaohua Chang* with a notion that its real musical and cultural function are no longer limited to an audible and visual singing performances, the results and discussion focused on its underlying meaning and function embedded in a musical performance. The researcher also questioned the female-centric performers. Thus, this study also attempts to explore the missing data and in-depth study of *Hua Chang* and its sensitive issues not covered by most etic account.

1.4 Research Objectives

This research is based on ethnography where the research tradition of auto-ethnography was employed. Below are the objectives of this research:

- a) To explore the music-making processes of *Diaohua Chang* as a form of a music business in a nightclub setting
- b) To investigate the functions of *Diaohua Chang* based on an auto-ethnographical perspective
- c) To discuss gender and social issues of *Diaohua Chang* based on an auto-ethnographical perspective of a male-singer

1.5 Research Questions

In this study, the author designed the research questions as follows:

- a) How the *Diaohua Chang* music-making processes contribute to music-business?
- b) Why is the function of *Diaohua Chang* according to the local Chinese community who participate in this musical activity?
- c) What is the insider's perspective of the *Diaohua Chang* in a nightclub setting?
- d) How gender and social issues impact the *Diaohua Chang* in a nightclub setting?

1.6 Significance of the Research

Geting (song-hall) and *genu* (sing-song girl) tradition had a long history back in the old Shanghai days (see Jones, 2001; Loo & Loo, 2014). The *Diaohua Chang* has a close resemblance to that of the old Shanghai *geting* and *genu* in a performance of Chinese popular songs, however, differs with a new function of performance and rewarding system. Thus, this study is significant in a sense that it serves as a continuity of the past tradition of Chinese popular performance since the 1930s, with a tradition that is brought till to present day Malaysia, and not in China.

In addition, compared to the past studies by Chang (2014) and Chin (2015), this research is significant in a way where the author was able to grant access to the research phenomena as an insider. Thus, the findings are from an emic account. In addition, as a male singer at *Diaohua Chang* the researcher was able to provide a research without biasness compared to the female counterpart, where there may be a huge challenge in presenting sensitive issues such as the derogatory label of sing-song girl and sexual issues (see Chapter 4). Besides, due to the commonly known legal issues among the insiders of *Diaohua Chang*, an autoethnographical approach with the researcher as an insider led to a more in-depth study of the research subject. The same reasons contribute to the significance of this contemporary Chinese musical and cultural study.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

Fieldwork is the methodology where one penetrates to the area of the study, and this may change ethnocentric views, in providing an analysis of the performance and its culture, to combine and produce an informed report that shows its meaning in terms of its culture (Berger, 1999). Cooley and Barz (2008) added that observation is an important approach at fieldwork, that the experience gained from the ethnographic study process allow the researcher to live in the lives of the individuals he or she studied, and then enable him or her to learn about the musical and cultural practice.

In relation to and yet different from ethnography, autoethnography with the pre-fix 'auto' allows the 'self' or more specifically, an insider, to contribute an emic account of the research subject as the scholar Jones stressed as a living story within the framework of research (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2016). This research is based on autoethnography approach where the researcher was a singer at *Diaohua Chang* (see Figure 1.1).

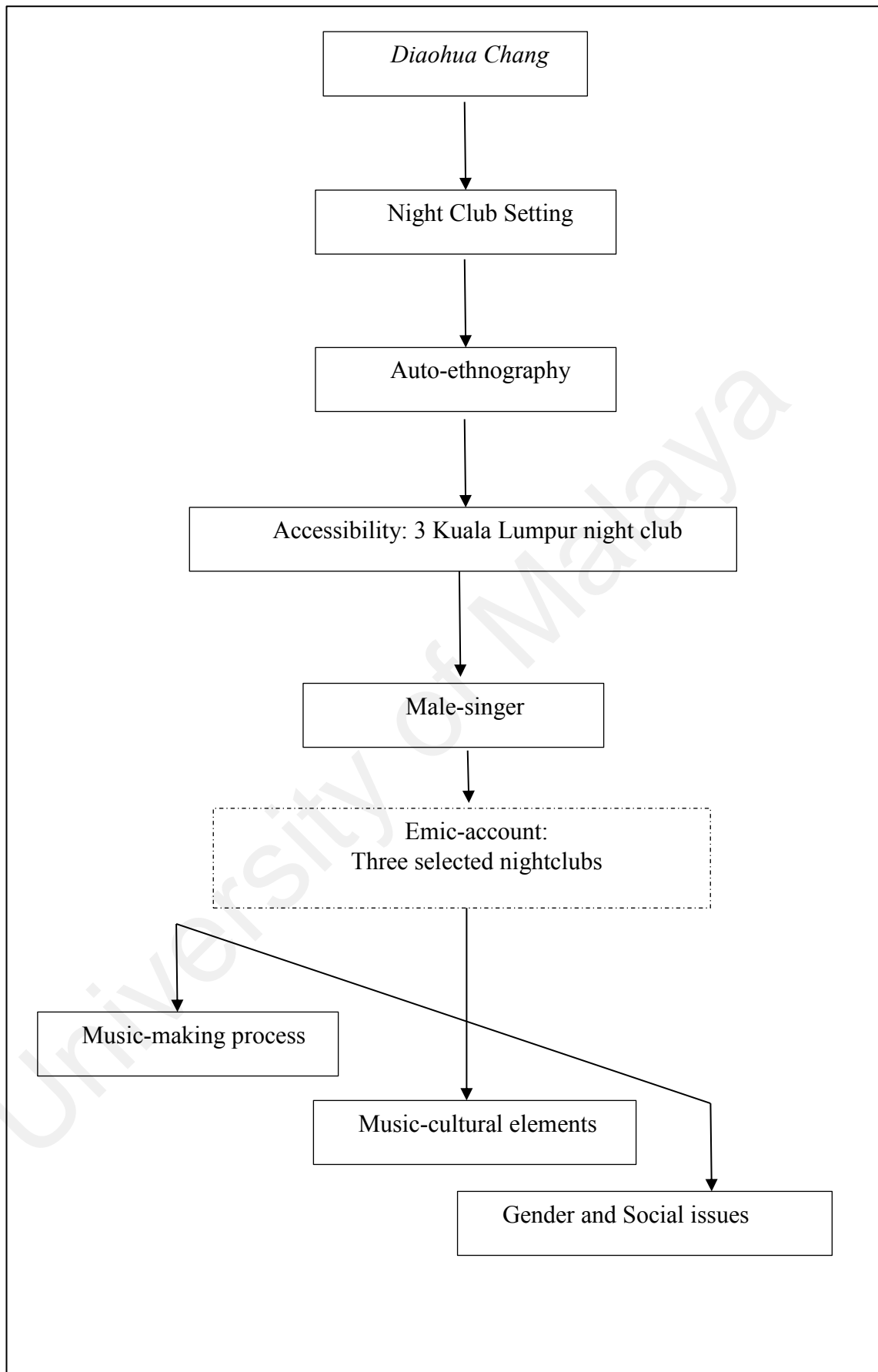


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

Research did not begin when the researcher was looking for a platform to perform as a continuity of his singing training and via friends, he was invited to sing occasionally at two nightclubs. However, the idea of autoethnography appeared as a research framework to study *Diaohua Chang* after completing the University of Malaya's research method course and ethnomusicology courses, where the author then tried to gain access to a nightclub of *Diaohua Chang* as the main research subject and field of study for the present research, and include past experience at previous performing venues of *Diaohua Chang* fields in the form of a reflexive writing.

According to Chang (2016, p. 13), four important points in the conceptual framework of autoethnography are:

- 1) Culture is a group-oriented concept by which self is always connected with others
- 2) The reading and writing of self-narratives provide a window through which self and others can be examined and understood
- 3) Telling one's story does not automatically result in the cultural understanding of self and others, which only grows out of in-depth cultural analysis and interpretation
- 4) Autoethnography is an excellent instructional tool to help not only social scientists, but also practitioners—such as teachers, medical personnel, counselors, and human services workers—gain profound understanding of self and others and function more effectively with others from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Thus, in this study, the tradition of autoethnography was employed as its theoretical framework to carry out data collection and analysis for a research output that answered the three main research objectives along with the research questions listed at Sections 1.4 and 1.5. Contextualising *Diaohua Chang* in an autoethnographic research calls for the

researcher's reflexive account, and at the same time, balancing between being neutral and having a critical input.

1.8 Limitation of the Study

As a scope of a mixed-mode Master's Degree in Performing Arts and the conceptual framework of an autoethnography, this study is limited to the time frame suitable for a mixed-mode master's degree duration where the first year consists of courses and another one to two years for research.

In this study, limitation was set to the author's personal participant observation as an insider of *Diaohua Chang*. Gaining access to the field remains the most challenging task in an ethnographic work. The author managed to gain access at three nightclubs as field sites and thus the data collected are limited to only three nightclubs. All three are located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Although there are many other *Diaohua Chang* around Malaysia, due to the limited scope of a mixed-mode Master's dissertation, this research limits to only *Diaohua Chang* in a nightclub setting.

Furthermore, the sensitive issues surrounding *Diaohua Chang* in a nightclub setting forms a challenge to the researcher in terms of interviewing the insiders for illegal matters. However, as a singer approved by the nightclubs to perform in their *Diaohua Chang*, I managed to interview not all, but some of the important informants listed in Chapter 3.

1.9 Conclusion

Diaohua Chang as a venue and an evolution of the *Ko-tai* singing tradition was selected in this study as a research subject focusing on the context of pub setting. More importantly, the close relation between the *Diaohua Chang* tradition and the origin of Chinese popular music rooted from the *shidaiqu* of the old Shanghai day may be an important reference to study the social and gender issues that suggest a live experience of how the performer and audience position themselves and react to the music making activity at *Diaohua Chang*.

Therefore, the following chapter discussed the literature review of related topics including the study of music and culture as in ethnomusicology, Chinese popular music and the social perspective of the Chinese music industry and its cultural reviewed works from past scholars.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A literature review is an important step before a research. Conducting a literature review provide an objective view by studying into past and present research, where a summary and an analysis of the related topic form knowledge for critical thinking and to also identify the gap in the literature (Hart, 1998). The aim of this chapter is to introduce to the reader the related literature that may provide knowledge for conducting the research on *Diaohua Chang* and form the prior knowledge for the researcher to conduct an autoethnographic study on the research subject. Besides that, this chapter is to identify the literature gap as well as to offer a rationale for conducting future research.

There is a lack of literature reviews concerning the scope of *Diaohua Chang*. However, there are some respective articles that may be in a way related to the issues surrounding the research subject, such as Chinese Popular Music in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, urban Chinese Entertainment, and Chinese Performing Art in Malaysia.

2.2 Chinese Popular Music in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong

Chinese popular music in Shanghai has bloomed since the 1930s and 1940s (Chen, 2005). It is the golden ages of Shanghai, where it rises as China's modernity, or more exactly, westernized modernity with new industry, commercial and financial hubs. Thus, Shanghai of that time, was the first metropolis reputed for its nightlife and cabarets. They were equipped with modern technology and amenities which equivalent to the Western country. However, the root of Chinese tradition and habits still prevail in the peoples' lives.

According to Chen (*ibid.*), it is as early as the 1920s, Chinese musician, Li Jinhui began his composition of children's songs and followed by music and dance for youngsters. However, he faced financial issues to fund for his project. News about the love songs he wrote received commercial success. Hearing that onwards, he turned to love songs as his main composition. Among his famous love songs are *The River of Peach Blossom* and *The Express Train*.

In the 1920s and 1930s what people referred to it as 'new songs of the times' were called *shidaiqu* (Jones, 2001). Shanghai popular songs or also known as *Shidaiqu* in Hong Kong (Chen, 2005), had been deeply influenced by Western musical elements such as Hollywood music, jazz and the content relate to Shanghai's life (Ho, 2016). As Chen described, among the typical style of Shanghai popular music during the 1930s and 1940s are; retaining the traditional China music pentatonic scales based on storytelling ballads that has a strong folk-tune melody, with additional Western compositional techniques such as chromaticism, modulation, American jazz scales and blues and many more. In terms of meter, instead of 2/4 or 4/4, 3/4 and 6/8 (which is known for waltz and European folk dance) are introduced in their song.

Due to the rise of song-hall where dance, especially ballroom dance became a culture in Shanghai, more rhythmic variations applied in the popular music. A combination of traditional instruments such as *huqin*, *sanxian*, drummer's kit consisting of a pair of clappers and a drum and Western instruments such as trumpet, clarinet, violin, piano and many more (2005). Besides, by comparing to Chinese folk songs, instead of both male and female performing, it is noted that women dominated in this Shanghai popular music scene. The lyrics are about sentimental romantic love, ordinary people's livelihood as well as weather and wildlife. However, the arrival of the communist regime had caused a decline in popular music in Shanghai by the end of the 1960s.

During the ruling of Deng Xiaoping, the shifted policy to the Open Door Policy in 1979, has brought reformation and a new wave to mainland Chinese (Mohanty, 2017). It was the first time, popular music is widely played on the mainland from Hong Kong and Taiwan (Brace, 1991; Gold, 1993). According to Gold (1993), these also include:

- a) film,
- b) television shows,
- c) literature,
- d) advertisements,
- e) décor,
- f) attire, and
- g) leisure

Brace (1991) witnessed in his paper that *Gangtai* style in the late 1970s as a Western music form conspires with the traditional Chinese melodies. It was the dominate style of youth popular music in mainland China, where performers were from Hong Kong or Taiwan (Brace, 1991).

Besides that, mainland China also contributed to the Chinese pop music by presenting two genre music; *Xibei Feng* (西北风) and *Yaogun Yinyue* (摇滚音乐). *Xibei Feng* is a Chinese pop music that represents life in mainland China, while *Yaogun Yinyue* is another type of music genre which also known as the Rock and Roll music. Brace (1991) demonstrated that both of the genres are rather rough vocal delivery ironically to the *Gangtai* style which is smooth, open voice; a typical style from Hong Kong or Taiwan. Cui Jian as the pioneer in the *Yaogun Yinyue* presented his song with hidden political issues and implicit protest.

Gold (1993) and Moskowitz (2008), explained the factors that increase the Chinese popular songs and its demand, including its popularity in Taiwan, Hong Kong and even in the mainland China:

- a) First, the reputation from martial arts films, romance, drama, and pop songs penetrated to Japan and South Korea
- b) Secondly, a type of 'light' music created using Western style and traditional pentatonic melodies, or composing a new one based on similar folk tunes was found to attract listeners. The combination of simplicity and relaxing tunes of the mainland became the 'hook.' For instance, the star of Taiwan, Teresa Teng's voice was perceived as the most seductive, as it was soft and with novelty (Gold, 1993).
- c) Besides, the melancholy character that gained its influence from the style of *enka* and *Taiyupop enka* of Japan is able to relate more to human's feelings (Moskowitz, 2008).

According to Matsue (2013), the popular music in Asia shows a combination of hybrid and fusion of local and the global. The scholar believes that Asian popular music has a long tradition, and its integration with the West is a norm in terms of this genre of musical production. The impact of globalisation over the past decades should not be ignored. It had brought people to meet technologies, media and ideologies beyond boundaries (Ho, 2003; Matsue, 2013). Globalisation is a process of local hybridization with global image, sounds, capital and meaning (Ho, 2003). It is important to recognize the ever-changing globalization process to understand how varied identities are produced through the performance of popular music in Asia today (Matsue, 2013).

2.3 Urban Chinese Nightlife Entertainment

Music is considered among the important aspect in the Chinese community. Music serves as a few functions such as socio-political ideals, entertainment, work song, and religious music (Thrasher, 1985). Entertainment is music performed for one's enjoyment during leisure hours, whether by amateurs or professionals. This encompassed dining experience where a sing-song performance for customers dated as early as Sung dynasty (960-1270) in China has been reported (Meng, 1957). It is not something new in Chinese culture.

Tan (1984) and Chang (2014), *Ko-tai* or *Getai* literally means "song stage" is a Chinese urban street theatre in Malaysia. It is a stage performance with a mixture of singing popular songs and comic sketches performed at religious festivals. The usual performing time of this form of performance is at night. The performance was held on an open-air stage with hawker stalls at the side of the stage.

Similar to Ho (2014) whom in his study stated that during the 1950s *Getai* in Singapore as an informal, Chinese popular live entertainment where patrons enjoy songs, sketches, and dances while enjoying light refreshments. It was a commercially-driven, urban entertainment which placed as the number two rank in entertainment after the cinema (Ho, 2014). The program starts at night, 8pm with full company comes on the stage for an opening chorus and followed by individual singers. The audience is given request slips to ask a favourite vocalist to sing a particular song. The event wraps up with humorous sketches, dances and a short play. Ho (2014) noted that the 1950s *Getai* is much different from today's *Getai* where, it is usually associated with Chinese festival such as the Hungry Ghost Festival.

Chin (2015), demonstrated a night entertainment in her research on *Diaohua Chang* in food courts around Klang Valley area; One Stop Food Court, Tai Wah Restaurant, City Food Court and Serdang Food Court. It is a stage performance, which surrounded by variety of hawker stalls in a food court, which is almost parallel to *Ko-tai* (Tan, 1984). Customers will purchase their food and enjoy their food along with the *Diaohua Chang* show. These *Diaohua Chang* typically served melon seed as a snack for their customers (mostly male) to enjoy the show (Chin, 2015).

Chin (2015) further mentioned that this melon seed culture brings an explicit symbolic for sex business, which is equivalent to the common snack mentioned by Henriot (2001) in the brothels during the old Shanghai days, in 1821. Male customers' demand for sexual gaze and pleasure also portrayed in Ho's (2014) study where the emergence of sexually-assertive women in *Getai* scene in the 1950s. Among the reason Ho (2014) highlighted such changes are due to:

- 1) Low barriers of entry,
- 2) High operating cost; entertainment duties were charged at a progressive rate and
- 3) Difficulties to retain talent; mostly left to join Radio Malaya, Rediffusion, Pagoda Parlophone and Pathe Gramophone recording companies as singers.

Such factors had led the *Getai* to involved with striptease, the source of business to *Getai*. Striptease became the post-war product of modernity and urbanization in Singapore (Ho, 2014). However, this striptease came to the end as the demand decline and also part of the state regulation. Striptease re-emerged in nightclubs by the mid-1960s. *Getai* entertainment lost its appeal as popular entertainment and finally extinct (Ho, 2014).

On the other hand, Spiller (2004) evidenced Chinese restaurants in the 1940s expanded their business to nightclub in San Francisco. Exotic Chinese food is introduced in their menu with Chinese entertainment. The first nightclub to introduce shows is the Forbidden City, a nightclub accommodated an eight-to-ten-piece orchestra performance, a large dance floor, with singers, chorus lines, dance teams, and acrobats (Spiller, 2004).

Soon, more nightclubs mushrooming in the city due to the demand from the Westerners. Shanghai Low is honored for being the first Chinese restaurant-cum-nightclub while Forbidden City is known for introducing the Chinese-American bar and dinner floorshow. Based on the scholar's interview with Nora Wong, a female emcee veteran, she stated that there were no gang and nothing illegal in this business. It was a norm for female staff like her to face disturbance from male customers. Wong replied "You say, 'no no no,' or, 'busy busy.'" (Spiller, 2004, p.97).

Spiller (2004) study of how the Chinese restaurant and nightclub in San Francisco, in the 1940s contributed to the cultural assimilation process between the Westerner and the Chinese. This is contrasted to Chin (2015) and Ho (2014) where they concluded their case study as a diaspora of yellow culture or eroticism. The divert context of a singing performance that closely linked to sexual conduct was documented (Chin, 2015). It is a huge social issue where the increase of illegal female Chinese migrants from China has taken place in the *Diaohua Chang*. Moreover, Chin (2015) pointed that *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia appears to be an illegal business where the sex industry is part of the business.

2.4 Chinese Performing Arts and *Shidaiqu* in Malaysia

In Malaysia, there had been a long debate on the Chinese performing arts and its stance in the country as Chinese is not the main population in Malaysia. It stands about 30% out of the majority of Malays and other minorities (Loo & Loo, 2012). With the implement of national culture policy in 1970s and 1980s, among the principles formulated were:

- 1) Malaysian national culture must be according to the indigenous people and if there are other elements from other tradition and culture that are suitable, or reasonable, can and may be included as a form of national culture.
- 2) The religion Islam will remain an important element in the Malaysian national culture (Tan, 1989).
- 3) The Chinese remain the minorities in the formation of national culture and therefore, the Chinese culture with its origin from China should not be recognized as part of the Malaysian national culture (Tan, 1989; Tan, 2000).

Many Chinese groups interpreted it as an attempt by the government to curb non-Malay cultures and to assimilate the Chinese. The situation worsens when there is no financial support nor any encouragement offered by the government. Hence it is all up to the Chinese themselves to preserve and promote their own culture. Due to all these factors, the Chinese performing arts in Malaysia need extra effort to compete for sponsorship within the limited Chinese population in this country (Loo & Loo, 2012).

Ko-tai is an urban street theatrical performance mainly by the Chinese and active during the time, 1980s, particularly in Penang, Malaysia (Tan, 1984). The origin of *Ko-tai* came from the performance that was brought in by the Hong Kong and China amusement park investors before the World War II period. It is an important form of Chinese culture practice in Malaysia which fosters the contact with an older art form of performance, as well as to expand and enhance the relationship between the young and

elderly performance skills (Tan, 1984). Tan (1984) also mentioned that among the reason *Ko-tai* in the 1980s was attractive to the audience due to the content of the play that relates to the current social phenomenon and politics.

Besides *Ko-tai*, Chinese culture in Malaysia also inherits puppet theaters, namely the glove puppet theater *Potehi*, Marionette and Rod puppet theaters (Tan, 1981). However, puppet theaters in Malaysia demonstrate a decline in audience appreciation due to the young generation today unable to understand the Chinese dialect, ancient plots and tune. Moreover, the lack of government support and public interest this performing art shows a declining graph (Matusky & Tan, 2004; Tan, 1981). Modern musical theatrical productions are also getting popular in the capital Kuala Lumpur (Loo, Loo & Toon, 2016).

Lion dance is another form of Chinese performing arts in Malaysia which has been going through many stages of debates to be recognised as a national cultural asset in Malaysia. Lion dance is a dance where two individuals animated the massive papier-mache head and body of colorful lions, in martial art movements following the drumming of *shigu* (Carstens, 1999; Chan, 2009). It is a practice commonly perform during Chinese New Year along with cymbals, gongs, drums, and firecrackers, expressed hopes for good fortune in the coming year (Carstens, 1999).

However, government only issue permits for lion dance on Chinese New Year. Nevertheless, the local Chinese art lovers continue to pursue their dreams to up rise their tradition to international level. The large barrel-like drum, *shigu* is one of the main and important instruments used to accompany Chinese lion dance. Perhaps with its effort in competition and the fame achieved by the leading troupe Kun Seng Keng that won the international lion dance competition kept its position and popularity among Malaysians (Loo & Loo, 2016).

On the other hand, in terms of Chinese percussion music, Bernard Goh, modernized the traditional context form of Chinese drumming along with the twenty-four seasons drum and set up the Hands Percussion in 1997 in Kuala Lumpur. The vision of Hands Percussion is to sustain the Chinese drumming musical culture via performing arts, and at the same time, creating a platform to continue to develop their artistic and creative input by forming new stylistic drumming performance that involves theatrical input and innovative contemporary musical style (Chan, 2009). The idea was first found by Tan Fui Choong, who formed the first 24-drum troupe representing agriculture calendar, with a division of 24 nodes, which are used to mark the agricultural season (Chan, 2009). With such effort and innovation, they have brought the Malaysian Chinese traditional art of *shigu* to the global stage. The 24 Seasons drum is also a popular co-curricular activity at local schools (Mei, Ying, & Saidon, 2015).

In addition to all the above, Chinese orchestra or better known as *Huayue Tuan* is another form of Chinese performing art in Malaysia. It was developed during the late nineteenth century where the Chinese immigrants used improvise opera tunes as well as Teochew, Hokkien and Cantonese folk tune and play it in an ensemble (Tan, 2000). According to Tan (2000), this Chinese orchestra is facing the same issues as other Chinese performing arts in terms of cultural context and political changes. Dama Orchestra, is another example of a local group that has survived. The reasons behind the survival of this group are the effort to transform and change. This orchestra used to be just a Chinese orchestra (Loo & Loo, 2012).

However, due to the lack of audience, the Dama Orchestra took the chance by expanding to theatrical. Dama has decontextualized *shidaiqu* in a theatrical setting (Loo & Loo, 2014). *Shidaiqu* is a popular song genre which is popular from 1920 to 1950 and in Malaysia, the songs were popularly performed at *Getai* such as during *Phor Tor* or

Hungry Ghost Festival. As mentioned in Loo and Loo (2012), due to the transformation from Chinese traditional orchestra, via *shidaiqu* performances, Dama has begun to regularly perform to full crowds where its performances grew from a concert per production to twenty over performances that ran in weeks in Kuala Lumpur theatre venue such as Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KLPA) and furthermore, the twenty over performances received full-house ticket sales.

There are many factors in contributing to the success of this group. Taking the example from the work *Butterfly Lover*; firstly, is by turning the Chinese golden oldies into a sung-through musical. In terms of singing and acting, a much simpler version of presenting the act is used with western operatic style. Besides that, Western instruments infused in the background, with lighting to display contrasting moods for various settings and simple props revealing modern style. In Loo and Loo's paper, reveals the issue of lack of patronage and the struggles of looking for patronage. With the innovations and transformation effort, the audience as well as the patronage is pleased with this hybrid sound and continue to support Dama productions (2012).

In terms of *shidaiqu* and its revival, Dama was perhaps the leading group that continues to sustain its *shidaiqu* performance. In a study by Loo and Loo, Dama transformed the derogatory reputation of sing-song girls and song hall that reveal a performance closely related to male gaze and nightclub business into a re-contextualised theatrical performance with narrative. The authors explained how Western trained sopranos were engaged in performing *shidaiqu* while the once Western orchestration back in the Shanghai days in accompanying these songs were treated with Chinese traditional music instruments such as *erhu*, *dizi* and *yangqin* (2014).

Still, reviewing the literature in performing arts in Malaysia showed a lack of studies concerning the tradition of *shidaiqu* and song halls in current times. Thus, this study aims

at an autoethnographical report of Chinese pop song sung at *Diaohua Chang* by focusing in nightclub setting.

2.5 Conclusion

The literature review served as a first step in this research. Literatures covered in this chapter reviewed studies in the development of ethnomusicology area and its main approaches, Chinese popular music and its origin and an overview of Malaysian performing arts and the staging of *shidaiqu* as a form of performing arts by the group Dama.

The literature supports the study as an ethnomusicology field where an autoethnography approach is taken into account to get the most emic results in the autoethnography. Aligning to this, musical culture has taken into account to investigate the function as well as the to explore the music-making the music process in the *Diaohua Chang*. While Chin (2015) and Ho (2014) study proved a diaspora of yellow culture or eroticism in the entertainment scene are parallel to this study where issues such as gender and social problem will be discussed further. In terms of the study's significance, this comes from the angle that Chinese popular music has developed tremendously during the past decades, as evidenced in many scholars written work about it. However, most studies focused on recording artists and the record label music industry while the case of *Diaohua Chang* is much neglected. Thus, this literature review revealed a lack of research on the *Diaohua Chang* and the following chapter shows the study's methodological approaches and its justification.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter revealed the methods used to collect data and theory used for analysis. It is a crucial section to explain how and what procedure taken to complete the data collections. According to Kallet (2004), specific procedures or techniques are applied to understand the thesis problem and at the same time allowing the reader to critically evaluate the overall validity and reliability of the study. This is a qualitative research where it relates to a deeper understanding of the norms and practice of social lives while its methodology calls for descriptive texts instead of measurable numerical numbers in its analysis (Brikci, 2007). For this study, researcher mainly used semi-structured interviews to collect data along with participant observation and personal communication.

3.2

3.3 Autoethnography

Autoethnography belongs to the research philosophy of qualitative study (Denzin, 2006; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). According to Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang (2010), the researcher is the subject and is the focal of the study as he or she is performing the investigation and at the same time, also a participant under study. The study of autoethnography is also very much centered over 'context' and as Wolcott (2004) explained, the study is about connecting oneself with others, the social and at the same time, within a context of study.

According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), 'graphy' means the research process, while 'ethno' equals to culture and self is labelled as 'auto' that lead to 'autoethnography.' The authors highlighted that when comparing ethnography and autoethnography, it was the

‘graphy’ part that differs as the research process is different. The research process in autoethnography initiated the insider as the researcher, and as an individual involved in the research setting. In this study, the author, as a male-singer at *Diaohua Chang* from China attempted to cross the line as a researcher and a singer involved at the research setting. The author is a Master’s Degree candidate whom graduated an undergraduate music degree at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris major in classical vocal. Continuing the passion of singing pop that is away from the academia tradition, the author discovered *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia and was invited by friends to perform occasionally at these settings while participating in a popular singing competition too, such as the 2018 *Sing! China*. Considering the nature of *Diaohua Chang* as a performance of Chinese popular songs and issues such as gender and legitimacy, the author then tried to gain access to a *Diaohua Chang* labelled as N3 in this study to fully study the research subject.

When the decision was made to study *Diaohua Chang* as a research, the author gained access to the nightclub N3 by asking permission to do a research, and sing at the club for his participatory experience. Audition and interview were carried out too, and due to the author’s prior experience at *Diaohua Chang*, it was easier to enable him to gain access and permission to enter the field.

By selecting autoethnography, the author gained the benefit of accessing the field of *Diaohua Chang* at a nightclub setting, which is originally a challenge considering an outsider’s request of conducting an academic research in such a setting, that has a close resemblance to the female-dominated sexual business and at the same time, not uncommon to legal issues such as police raid of illegal foreign female workers. Thus, the following section, a detailed discussion of the selected field, key informants and research process is reported.

3.3.1 Field Selection

The field of study in this autoethnographic study consists of three locations or nightclubs labelled as N1, N2 and N3 in this study due to the sensitive issues discussed in this research that involve legal matter and police raid. The author focused mainly on N3 in the period of this study while prior experience at N1 and N2 formed reflexive accounts that contribute to the discussion of *Diaohua Chang* at nightclub setting. Below is a list of the three sites visited and their location:

a) N1

Maluri, 55100 Cheras, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur

b) N2

Jalan Raja Chulan, 50200 Kuala Lumpur.

c) N3

Imbi, 55100 Kuala Lumpur.

In ethnomusicology, field is a selected space and at this geographical venue, the researcher collects data to test cultural theories, where the research also needs to gather data from the insiders who are able to contribute deep insights into the music and musical practices (Rice, 2008). Researcher as the outsider will encounter to try to enter the insiders' culture and explain the relationship between music and culture to demonstrate the truth of the theory that music is part of the insiders' culture.

Fieldwork is a process and in this process, the researcher is positioned as a social actor and he or she studies the research subject within the natural setting of the cultural situation (Cooley & Barz, 2008). Observation and experience are taken into account during the ethnographic process. Ethnomusicologist engages himself learning about a specific music-cultural practice.

Fieldwork is not merely for observing and collecting purposes, but as experiencing and understanding music (Titon, 2008). The researcher becomes the student and the informant becomes the teacher or wise elder (*ibid.*). It is the core in ethnomusicology study, which is distinguished from other types of field of studies. And most significantly scholarly contributed to the ethnomusicology field. Among the reasons for choosing these three pubs as the fieldworks are because:

- a) Their pubs demonstrate among the highest daily regular and new customer record.
- b) The in-charged person and staffs in these pubs are friendly and open to questions asked for the research.
- c) Their General Managers offer lots of opportunities for the young singers to showcase their musical talent in his pub regardless of their performing experience and talent.

3.4 Anonymity of Informants

As the content of this research is sensitive due to the nature of the research subject in a nightclub setting where Chapter four will further explain legal issues and police raid, the protection of confidentiality is thus important to informants.

Sieber (1992) stressed on the confidentiality of participants in data collection, analysis and reporting. While Baez (2002) explained that the main aim of confidentiality in qualitative research is that each participant's confidentiality must be assured as to prevent harm. Cwikel and Hoban (2005) discussed the complication in attaining informed consent where in their study on victimized sex workers led to a few revisited ethical procedures.

Firstly, informants were reluctant to sign a consent form where the case of a verbal form of informed consent was employed. Secondly, pseudonym was employed in protecting confidentiality. Thirdly, in most cases informants were unfamiliar with the consent and research ethics procedure and this invite challenge to the research. The researchers recommended consent form approval using pseudonyms or a verbal version in practice.

According to Miller (2015), photography serves an important purpose in disseminating information about life and behavior, however, the confidentiality and ethics play an important role in a research. Crow and Maclean (2000) stressed about the tradition of labelling informants with pseudonyms. On the other hand, Crow and Wiles (2008) also expressed the problems with ramification in photographs.

In terms of the intimacy of autoethnography where the researcher is an insider with the participants, Bolyor (2017) mentioned that the level of internal and external confidentiality is important. For example, external readers of the research report may not identify the said participants, but given the relationship with the author and various characteristics, the 'internal' individuals in the research setting are able to identify the participants. Thus, this brings on the awareness of internal and external confidentiality of a participant.

Considering the difference in argument, this study opted on pseudonyms for key informants and the application of black strip over the eyes of informants, along with verbal consent as stated by Cwikel and Hoban (2005). Although some may argue over the application of a black strip or band is insufficient in masking the identity of the individual, especially celebrity, however, in this study, the informants are not the celebrities and their identities in photos are not easily recognized.

Furthermore, the research aims at reporting *Diaohua Chang* as a whole in answering the three main research objectives, where individual stories, behavior, and characteristics of a particular singer are not the concern. Thus, this ensures the safety of internal confidentiality.

3.5 Personal Communication

In this study, the role of the researcher whom at the same time was a singer at the research setting enables intimate access to the field along with communication with the informants. Thus, personal communication was employed during fieldwork where a more detailed communication was carried out with three main informants as listed in this section. Besides that, data collection from informal conversations with other singers, hosts, and managers of the pub regarding their cultural background, performance experience, working process, their roles and personal experiences in *Diaohua Chang* were gathered too.

As this research is carried out in a nightclub setting, personal communication was employed as a friendlier approach instead of conducting structured or semi-structured formal interviews. For the purpose of this study, the researcher observed and communicate with 20 singers and patrons for the data collection. Overall, their age ranges

from 18 to 30 years old. For singers, they were mainly divided into two categories; the high-income and the low-income. The researcher collected his data through chatting with the insiders community before work, during breaks, as well as while working and after work. WeChat, a messaging application was used for communicating with the informants too. Usually, a longer chat lasted no more than 30 minutes as employees were suppose to work or chat with customers, not among themselves. At times, a mere 5 minutes talk was carried out during the field. It all depends on availability and interest level. As a male-singer at the *Diaohua Chang*, the author successfully managed to collect informants without being a 'stranger' in the field.

Among the informants in this study are the host and hostess, and the male and female singers. Pseudonyms were used in the protection of confidentiality and anonymity.

a) Shane (pseudonym)

Shane, is from China. He is one of the foreign hosts of the nightclub (N1). According to Shane, he had six years of experience working at *Diaohua Chang* that include a night club named The Pearl of the Night (夜明珠) four years ago.



Figure 3.1: Shane, the host (Photo by author, June 18, 2017).

b) Jay (pseudonym)

Jay is a local singer who has been working in *Diaohua Chang* for more than ten years. Besides being a singer, sometimes he is appointed as the host for some particular events. Jay is working at N3.

c) Jane (pseudonym)

Jane is a foreign female hostess and singer from Northeastern of China. Married with children, she worked at *Diaohua Chang* for a living and is currently a hostess at N3.



Figure 3.2: Jane, the hostess and singer (Photo by author, June 18, 2017).

d) Boss B (pseudonym)

In this study, the author labels the employer as Boss, who is one of the business partners of N3. Boss B plays a role in managing the sales and distribution of alcoholic drinks.

3.6 Participant Observation

During the fieldwork, the researcher participated in the *Diaohua Chang* from 9 pm to 3 am, every night. Researcher adopted the research tradition of autoethnography approach by focusing on the live performances, the organization of sounds and attention as well as the lived experience of social person and the author's reflexive account as an insider.

Align with this, the researcher used the participant-observation method to facilitate interaction with the participants in the *Diaohua Chang* pub setting as well as the silent observer from the perspective of an audience. Observation notes and interview questions derived from research questions were used as a guide to obtain the study objectives.

Table 3.1: Researcher's fieldwork duration from the three different locations.

Location	Date Started and Ended	Fieldwork Duration
N1	January 18, 2015 until March, 2016	1 year 2 months
N2	April 1, 2016 until April 30, 2017	1 year
N3	June 1, 2017 until 31 July, 2018	1 year

Researcher posited himself as a singer and host in the daily routine of *Diaohua Chang* in order to be part of the organization to observe and gather more information through an emic lens. It was fortunate that the General Managers provided researcher the opportunities to obtain reliable information from the singer as well as the patrons in the fieldwork. The table 3.1 is a summary of the researcher's fieldwork duration from the three different locations.

3.7 Virtual Fieldwork

Virtual fieldwork is one where a face-to-face ethnography is absent, and a research used technological aid to conduct e-communication or to observe the phenomenon being studied via an online system, and thus leading to data collection (Cooley, Miezal & Syed, 2008). Internet technology is used to study virtual communities that exist only online. The researcher had used this method to collect data: 1) the community opinions on *Diaohua Chang* and 2) communication with the informants.

Below is a list of sites visited:

- 1) Web search
- 2) WeChat
- 3) YouTube
- 4) eForum such as:
 - a) www.ptt.cc
 - b) cforum.cari.com.my/forumcn.cari.com.my/forum
 - c) http://www.lidoooo.com/Article/xjpdhcsesm_1.html
 - d) <https://www.ptt.cc/bbs/Singapore/M.1382012624.A.240.html>
 - e) <http://sgforums.com/forums/1802/topics/483983>
 - f) <http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-funinfo-4633986-1.shtml>
 - g) <http://viralcham.com/%E5%BF%85%E7%9C%8B/hamsapnk120416/>
 - h) <https://tw.appledaily.com/headline/daily/20131206/35488846/>
 - i) <https://cforum.cari.com.my/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=3883548>
 - j) http://geylangsexygirl.blogspot.com/2015/08/blog-post_16.html
 - k) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMWmjNDseVg>
 - l) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHmTwXt-vx8>
 - m) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FN0V6hktU4I>

n) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbYR5NhYvJA>

Virtual fieldwork provides how the local community perceives the activities or matters regarding *Diaohua Chang*. Not only that, some who raised concerns over the subject matter will be discussed in Chapter 4.

3.8 Post-fieldwork

Post-fieldwork includes analysis of data collected from fieldwork, which consists of:

- a. The definition of *Diaohua* and *Hua Chang*
- b. Performances in the *Diaohua Chang*
- c. Socio-cultural issues
- d. Gender issues
- e. Coding, categorization and forming themes

Finally, a triangulation of data from various sources from literature, fieldwork, and a self-reflexive account of the author as a singer at the *Hua Chang* was correlated for a scientific explanation and viable discussion. See Figure 3.4 for the layout of the research methodological framework.

3.9 Conclusion

As a summary, the research methods involved in this study includes face to face interview at fieldwork and also virtual fieldwork that includes data collection via e-approaches. Figure 3.3 shows a summary of the research direction.

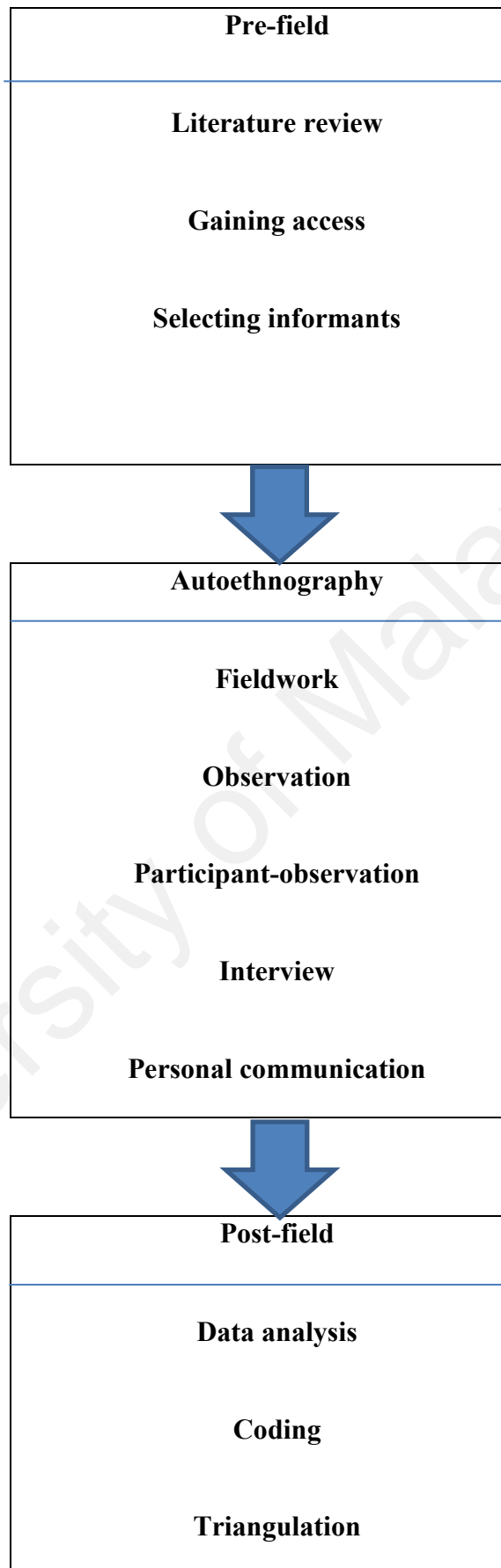


Figure 3.3: Methodological framework

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is to present the data collected from the fieldwork done since January 18, 2015, to June 2, 2018, at N1, N2 and N3 in a form of autoethnography writing. Besides that, the intention of this chapter is to contribute theoretical analysis on the life experience of the performers and the audience, based on the methodological paradigm of autoethnography. In addition to this, other aspects such as the cultural function in the perspective of social discourse, psychology and behavior of the audience, gender and social issues are discussed in this chapter as well

4.2 *Diaohua Chang* as a Music Performing Business

In this section, the author cross-examined and analysed data based on personal observation and secondary source in identifying the concept of *Diaohua Chang*. *Diaohua Chang* is known as a commercial entertainment outlet where singing performance was on a temporary stage or more commonly known as *getai* (Tan, 1984), and developed into a permanent venue, as recorded in the past studies, such as Ho (2013), Chang (2014) and Chin (2015). Whether it is in the setting of open-air food court, as in Chin's study (2015) or *getai* as in (Tan, 1984), this is a sing-song performance where flower garland can be bought to be given to audience's favourite singers as an act of appreciation.

The stage is one of the crucial parts of the *Diaohua Chang*. It is the platform or space for all the performers to perform and as the center of focal point for the audience. The music-making here resemblance to the *geting* or nightclub during the 1930s and 1940s in old Shanghai and *shidaiqu* where in the study of Loo and Loo (2014) shows a history of how Chinese popular songs developed under the influence of Western culture. Most

singers or *genü* who did not make it to the record label like those of Zhou Xuan and Bai Guang ended up singing and working here. Rather similar to the label of *genü* in the old Shanghai days, female singers at *Diaohua Chang* also receive the same derogatory label of singing at *Hua Chang*, where the proceeding sections of this dissertation will continue to discuss these issues.

According to the general manager of N1, he stated that location is the main factor to consider before setting up a *Diaohua Chang* business (personal communication, January 21, 2016). Ideally, the location is located in a Chinese populated area, but not at the residential district due to the fact that the nature of the *Diaohua Chang* business hours that operates until midnight. It's usual hour of operation is from 9 pm to 3 am which would cause certain disturbance to the residents. Besides that, it is a necessity to be able to get license approval for selling of alcohols and cigarettes that is important in this line of business.

The number of singers hired for *Diaohua Chang* depends on the size of the business and space. For example, at N1, there are only two to four singers arranged for each *Diaohua Chang* event due to limited space at the location. In the following section, the author discussed how *Diaohua Chang* as a music business operates and managed, with legal issues, based on data collected with the author's participant observation at three *Diaohua Chang* venues.

4.2.1 Staff Planning and Division of Work at the *Diaohua Chang*

From the author's field visits, it is gathered that *Diaohua Chang* is a business which is not only owned by a single boss. It is a joint-venture company. As observed at the three *Diaohua Chang* venue, the owners are between four to five persons. Profit sharing from the investment is depending on the percentage the investor invested. For instance, the bigger investor will get a higher profit than the smaller ones.

In terms of responsibility, the bigger investor only concerns about providing capital funding to the company as well as choosing the *Diaohua Chang* representative. While the smaller investor will be responsible to run the business. It is divided into few positions; General Manager, Department Supervisor, Stage Directors, Hosts, Cashiers and the Diplomat and a mamasan, as described by Royal and Strahan (2013) as female floor manager more commonly known as 'mommy' among the Chinese speaking community.

At the *Diaohua Chang*, a general manager is hired to be in charge of the whole organization, human resource and running the *Diaohua Chang* business. These include daily report sales like flower wreath sales, food and beverage sales, staff arrangements, organising weekly meeting with staffs, tackling problems between staffs and customers, reporting company's monthly salary, which includes basic salary and profit and lastly, monitoring if facilities are always in good condition. He will make a daily report to the boss about the daily business sales and conditions, which include police appearance at the scene, customers' flow, staff performance report like which singers' having the most flowers, mamasan's flower sales and many more.

Therefore, in this sense, the sales of the flower wreath depict the quality of the performance and the popularity of the singer. The general manager is able to know who is the highest performing singers based on this measure. Besides, he is given the approval and all rights and obligations to manage, and supervise the *Diaohua Chang* business while the owners may not be present. However, when there is an occurrence of a major police operation that turn up at the nightclub, the proprietors will attend the case himself instead of the general manager. The organization chart is as follows:

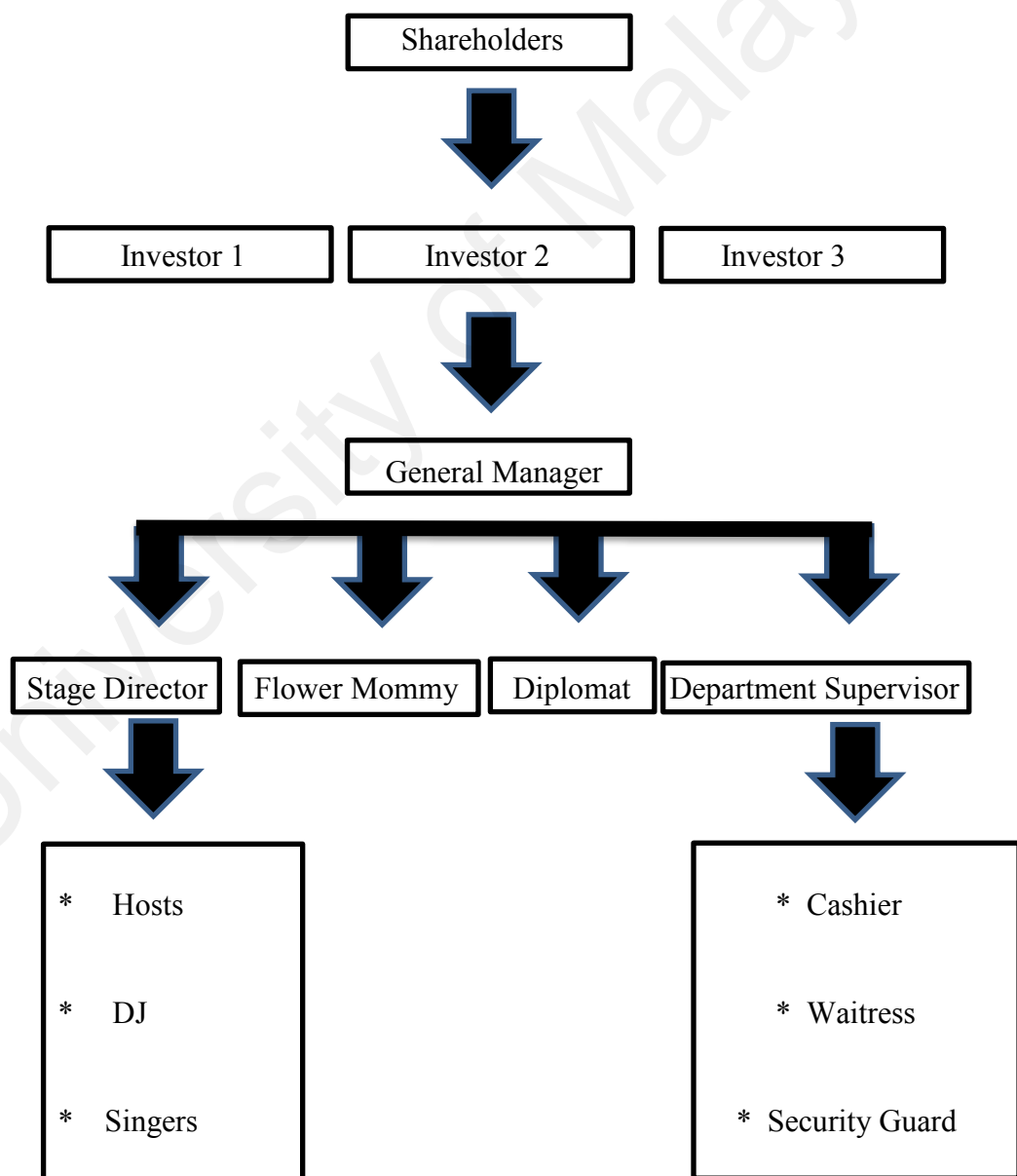


Figure 4.1: Organization Chart

The hierarchy of the organization places the general manager at the top, while below him are other important roles played by different positions that consist of:

1. Supervisor
2. Mamasan
3. Stage Directors
4. Hosts
5. DJ
6. Singers
7. Diplomat.

Lower-ranked staffs are the cashier, waiters, security guards and cleaners. Topping on the list of the upper-ranked, the department supervisor is responsible for the front desk cashier, total sales of beverages including alcoholic beverage, parking lot security, customers' reservation arrangement and waiters work schedule. The supervisor reports to the general manager.

A mamasan is an important person at the nightclub business. Among the community of *Diaohua* business, is believe that the mamasan plays the key role in deciding the profit and business of *Diaohua Chang*. Her duty is like a sales manager who keeps targeting at pleasing, attracting and liaising with the customers. Her role includes selecting suitable singers for the customers by arranging them to have a chit-chat session and dining together. By such interaction, the customers will get to know the singers better and hopefully, form a good relationship. Thus establishing a mutual relationship between the

customers and the singers will indirectly boost the sales of flower garland, that has a rather similar effect to that of attracting ‘fan’ and support.

Similar to that in performing arts, a Stage Director is hired and is responsible for all the stage management roles. These include managing all the performers (including complaints from the singers and hosts), sound systems, the flow of the whole performance and fees negotiation for the performing guests.



Figure 4.2: Order of Appearance (Photo taken by Author, August 15, 2017).

On the other hand, there's a position of a host. The Host's duty is to present the *Diaohua Chang* program on stage. Their most crucial job is to teach and explain to the singers how to pose and present themselves in an attractive way to meet the audience demand. They will call up the singers for meetings to settle issues faced by the singers and announce the company's recent news and updates. Thus, this position is usually held by a more experienced singer or senior host. They will also arrange the flow of the programs and decide an ensemble that include an attractive combination of performers (see Figure 4.1 and 4.2).



Figure 4.3: Host and Hostess at N2 (Photo taken by Author, August 15, 2017).

As for the singers, *Diaohua Chang* has a different requirement. There may be an assumption that the job of a singer demands very high singing skills, however, at *Diaohua Chang* the singers do not need to have any singing qualification or training. The criteria for recruiting singers are:

- 1) Physical appearance
- 2) Working experience at a nightclub
- 3) Communication skills
- 4) Able to sing (but professional singing skills are not the key criteria)

Thus, the criteria of recruitment reflect what Jones (2001) explained as *genu* or sing-song girls back in the old Shanghai days in the 1930s and 1940s where the singers ‘sell-songs’ and are perceived as a prostitute or hostess at nightclubs. Thus, in this sense, *Diaohua Chang* very much resembles the scenario of the old Shanghai nightclubs, or a continuity of the music business.

Another position, that is the Disc Jockey or DJ, plays the responsibility to play the song sung by the singer, according to the sequence as planned for the show. At a nightclub setting, of all the fields the author visited, there was no live band or musician. Karaoke was used instead. The advancement of technology provides aids to music performance and education (Teen, Haji Ramli & Ying, 2014), thus, the use of karaoke at *Diaohua Chang* in a way reduced cost of musicians and provide a well-mixed recording of minus 1 for singers. A DJ will help to adjust the volume and sound quality of the songs played as well as the sound from a keyboard and the microphones. New singers will need to inform with the DJ ahead and explain the songs that they will sing, alternation of key, and the sequences. When there is a huge event, the DJ will be rehearsing with the singers by playing the songs according to the plans. The DJ also plays additional role, such as stage

lighting adjustment, design, and also helping with technical adjustment such as microphone, unlike what other DJs do at a disco for example.

Another important position is the Cashier, as unlike ordinary cashier, *Diaohua Chang* in a nightclub setting involves a huge cash transaction through the act of ‘hanging flower.’ The cashier will also need to deal with purchases, that include swiping of credit cards and cash sales, record all other profit, such as number of flower garland for which particular singer, as well as daily sales from the mamasan.

A very important role among the upper-level staffs is what they call a ‘diplomat.’ From the data collection, what is gathered reveal that a ‘diplomat’ is a person who acts as the middle person between the company and the police (personal communication with an anonymous diplomat, July 6, 2017). Liaison with the police is a long-term association with the company to survive. In my personal communication with the officer responsible as a diplomat at N1, he told me that his main job is to find ways to receive news when police raid will take place. As to how successful a diplomat is, that is determined by the fact that the nightclub is able to receive news about the police raid before the operation takes place. Therefore, this will naturally involve bribery in the form of cash. This inevitably links to what Jones (2001) terms as ‘yellow’ culture.

A few common terms were used as how the informant explained. They label the act of receiving news about police raid as:

- 1) *Paofeng* (跑风, translated as gathering / running ‘wind’)
- 2) *Youfeng* (有风, translated as receive / detection of ‘wind’)

Wind is a common term in Chinese used in a figurative way to signify ‘message.’ Running ‘wind’ refers to the diplomat in his or her act in gathering ‘message’ while

Detection of ‘wind’ refers to when the diplomat receives ‘message’ or updates regarding police raids.

Once ‘wind’ is detected, the manager will ask all staffs to take a break and evacuate the nightclub. In the author’s experience at N3, the staffs were told strictly about the rules and regulations in facing police raids, especially foreign singers who used traveling visa to work at *Diaohua Chang*. Salaries will be deducted, if one does not compromise with it. Any caught in the hand of the police, will bring a big risk to the business set up and licensing. Thus, this matter leads to the following section, regarding the legitimacy of running *Diaohua Chang* in a nightclub setting.

4.2.2 Legitimacy of *Diaohua Chang*

Before discussing further about the operation of *Diaohua Chang*, it is important to mention a brief description about the legitimacy of *Diaohua Chang*. A researcher has pointed out that *Diaohua Chang* is considered an illegal business (Chin, 2014). The nature of the business consists of singers from local Malaysian who hold Malaysia citizen identity cards, China singers who hold China passports, and lastly the minority of Thailand singers who hold Thailand passports. Occasionally, the *Diaohua Chang* entertainment outlet detained in the police raid and inspections on the patrons and workers. The police eradicated those who involved in drug abuse, illegal workers, and prostitution on the site.

The case of a police raid at *Diaohua Chang* is not uncommon such, as reported by local news (Sinchew, 2015). According to Malaysia’s law, foreigners are allowed to work if they have obtained working visas. Otherwise, either the Immigration Department

officer or the police officer may detain a raid upon them. Most of the *Diaohua Chang* singers do not have a legal work permit.

The informant of this study, Shane, who worked at N3, described one of the past experiences he faced in the past *Diaohua Chang* venue (Interview, July 8, 2017). He narrated that there was this one night, the company received a news that there was a “wind” that night. By 8 o’clock his boss announced evacuation and to close business temporarily. But at 11 o’clock, the company called all the staffs to return to work because the wind is over.

According to Shane, most of the staff immediately came back to the nightclub and work for they were eager to earn money, especially being a foreigner, their main aim to come to Malaysia is to hope to earn a good income. However, just after the business began to operate for about an hour, suddenly, a troop of police rushed into the scene at 12.15 am. As Shane recalled, out of a sudden, the music stopped and full lights were on, as commanded by the police.

Still in shock, all the people in the scene were divided into two groups for identity inspection. Malaysians who hold identity cards stand on one side, while the foreigners with passports on the other side. Locals without an identity card and foreigners without passports will be taken by the police to the police station. They were all handcuffed and sent to the police station by a police truck. At the police station, they took a urine test and provided statements. Those with positive urine result with suspicion of drugs will be detained.

Shane admitted that although he knew that it was illegal to work in Malaysia without a true working permit, he still did it. What he had at that time was a normal visitor passport. He explained that during that time, twelve of them from China, including

Indonesian waiters were detained for a total of eleven days at the police station. According to the Malaysian international constitution stipulates that police can only detain foreigners' for up to 14 days of detention. They were finally released on bailing and through diplomacy with the police. For Shane, it was a painful experience. They were caught when the police came at the time when all the singers were on the stage for their final appearance.

Shane was then told that although the nightclub practiced having a 'diplomat' to collect information about police raids through bribery, however, the police themselves have 'spies' whom came to the field and receive information about illegal conduct at the nightclubs. Shane explained that "the spy is what we called 'snake' or *fangshe* [放蛇]" literally translated as 'releasing the snake' into the nightclub. The 'snake' will then supply information about the best time to have a police raid.

From the perspective of another informant such as Jay (Interview, July 9, 2017) who worked at N3, he stated that there is nothing to be afraid about the police raid. As a citizen of Malaysia, he has his Mycard to prove his citizenship. However, sometimes he was called to the police station or the immigration office to provide information for other investigations. Jay explained that he had his sympathy over the foreign singers. He explained that, these foreign singers are always in fear of police raids and for they travelled a long way from their home in search of a job, it is not an easy life for them.

On the other hand, Jay mentioned that they knew it is illegal for them to work here without working visas. Nevertheless, he explained that the monetary attraction with this type of night-job is difficult to resist. It can provide them with a very high income. At the *Diaohua Chang* where Jay worked, the foreign singers are mostly from China. The local Chinese only manages the business and as Jay described "when it is windy" the

Malaysians will quickly ask all the singers from China to leave the venue immediately and the locals stay back to operate the business as usual (Interview, July 9, 2017).

From both of the interviews, both informants demonstrated the issues of facing the sudden police raid which effects on their daily income. Although, Jay is not afraid of the police inspections but the appearance of police in the premise will certainly effect their business and negative view to the customers and society.

4.2.3 Operating a Nightclub- Diaohua Chang

Diaohua Chang at N3 operates differently from the conventional *Diaohua Chang* at the food court in terms of its setting, price, and function. As Chin (2015) described, the food court-based *Diaohua* performance is not a luxury entertainment business, it is an open-air food station where different stalls selling different food, and that dining is the main reason for customers along with entertainment provided by singers on a simple stage. In a nightclub setting with air-conditioning and comfortable couches, chairs and tables, and a permanent stage for performance, such as the fields visited by the author, there is barely food sold.

On the contrary, nightclub only offers light snacks and beverages such as peanuts, and the sales of beverage, especially alcoholic drinks and imported beers such as Guinness Stout and Carlsberg becomes the main income compared to a food court.

Based on the observation at N3, there are three main menus in their pub; alcoholic drinks, snacks, and fruits (see Figure.4.3). The menu focuses mainly on alcoholic drinks.

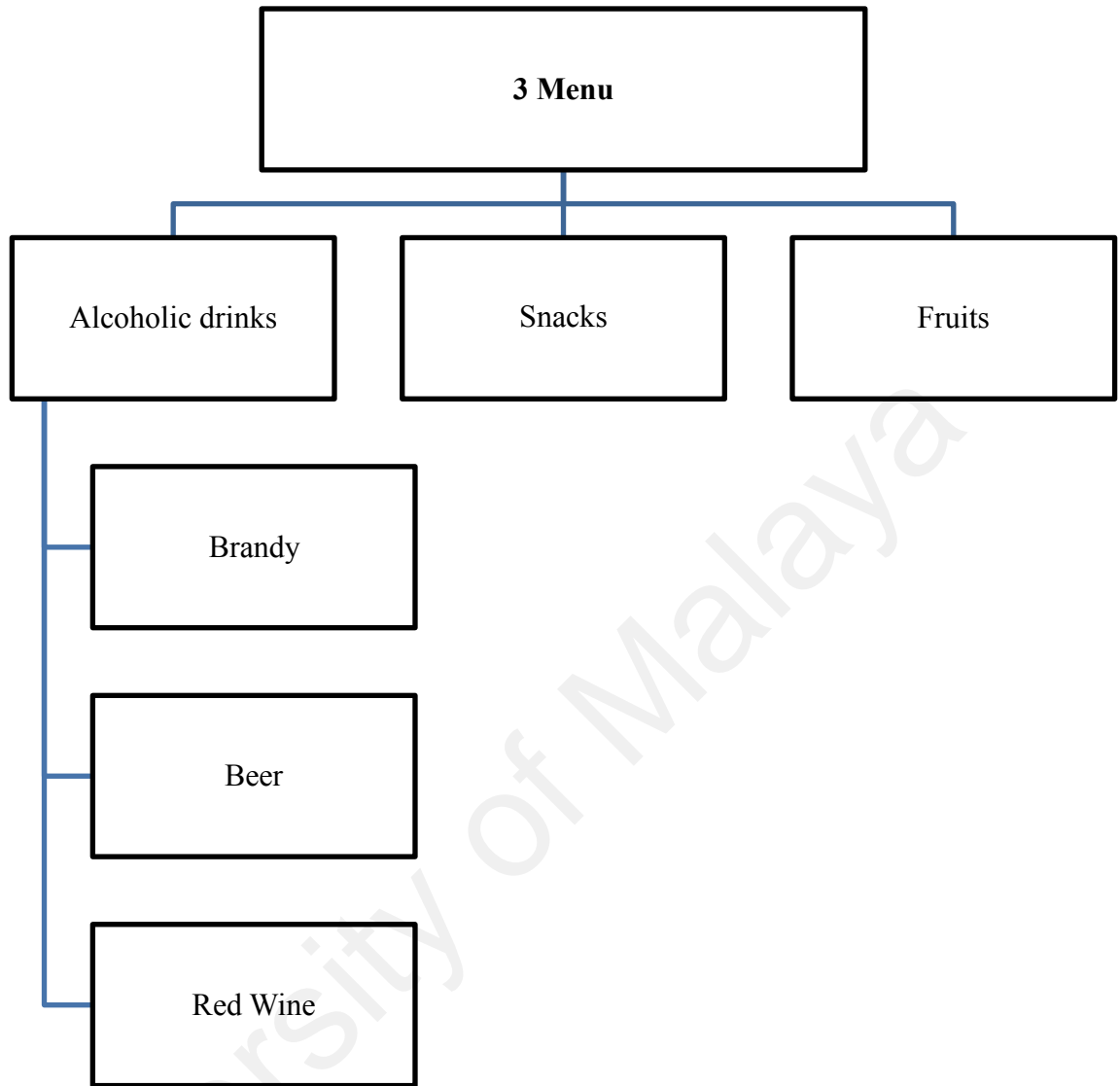


Figure 4.4: 3 Menu category at N3.

A notable difference is that, beverage price at nightclub *Diaohua Chang* is more expensive compared to the retailed price or at the food court. For instance, a bucket of Carlsberg bottled beer (a total of eight bottles of 330ml) is sold at RM155 per bucket. The retailed cost is only RM 60 to RM 70 and while compared to local marts such as KK Mart, a bottle of Carlsberg beer is sold for only RM 8. During the author's personal

communication with Boss B (June 25, 2015), he explained that for a bucket of eight 330ml bottles one can easily get it at local mart for RM64, however, at the nightclub N1, the price was set 30% higher than its retail price.

Boss B also revealed that it is important to know the best way in getting supply of beers via two ways – legal and illegal: a) purchasing from the Malaysia alcoholic beverages manufacture and b) through alcohol smuggling channel for tax evasion. The cost for the local manufacturers is very high. Thus, in order to make more profit, cutting down the cost is inevitable.

Most nightclubs will choose to the alcohol smuggling channel as the cost is so much lower. Moreover, the quality of alcohol purchased is the same as the local manufactures. This brings a high profit for the nightclub owners. He added that at *Diaohua Chang*, customers will definitely buy alcoholic beverage even if they do not buy a flower wreath for the singers. Boss B confidently claimed that he will continue to expand his alcoholic beverage for its high profit and promising business.

Another difference between food court and nightclub *Diaohua Chang* is the karaoke stage. However, it is different from KTV either. According to the General Manager of N3 (Personal communication, July 21, 2017) the following is a list of differences between the setting of a Karaoke song hall and a *Diaohua Chang*:

- a) The premise is to provide guests with a good entertainment and environment with exciting programs in the company of young beautiful women.
- b) Entertainment includes having snack, alcoholic drinking, chit-chatting and playing games with their preferred singers
- c) Enjoying entertaining performance along with alcoholic drinks and snacks

- d) Participating during the performance in the act of purchasing flowers and giving or hanging on the singers' neck
- e) Forming a relationship with the singers via drinking together

As the general manager described, "Everything is under a roof. Is there a reason for not choosing to come to *Diaohua Chang*?" (Personal communication, July 21, 2017). Thus, it is obvious that *Diaohua* at a nightclub setting resembles closely to the 1930s and 1940s depiction of *genü* and their derogatory lower social hierarchy as discussed by Jones (2001) and Loo and Loo (2014).

4.2.4 *Diaohua Chang* Setting

The layout of *Diaohua Chang* is different from a KTV room. A KTV room is designed for freestanding effect. Based on the N3 setting layout, it is divided into two parts; the ground floor and the first floor. The ground floor is divided into few areas; the stage, the DJ station, the warehouse, the cashier counter, food and beverage bar, the bathroom, the dressing room and the make-up room (see Figure 4.4). They have expensive sofas, which is a loose platform, located from number 08, 18, 28, 58, 81, 82, 83, 85, 86, 87, 88, 98, and 108.

On the first floor number 68, 78, 80 are the high-class sofas. While the private room is located at number 188 and 288. The private room is designed for comfort equipped with comfortable a sofa, an alcohol table, an air conditional, a private toilet and a television where the stage performance can be watched live at the room. It is for regular customers or customers in a group or for those customers who like personal space without

disturbance from others. This room is expected for a minimum consumption of RM 2,000 per group and is considered a much higher consumption compared to the other seats.

The seats located at the back of the stage, with the number 68,78 and 80 are for individual customers or at the most, accompanied by another one or two friends. Therefore, this type of customers is considered a much lower consumption; means a lower sale. Space is quite limited. However, some Malaysian customers preferred this area for it is located at the corner of the room and it is harder to be seen. They abstain the use of number four, because it is a Chinese belief that number means dead. Hence, it is not a lucky number to use. The most frequent use number is number six means smoothly or well-off and number eight means wealth.

All the sofas are designed for pleasure and luxury experience, different to the *Diaohua Chang* at food court setting. They are located near to the stage to have a good view of the performances. Singers' voice and appearance could be heard and seen clearly. Each sofa accommodates about ten customers. This type of customers is labeled as the big customers (大客, da ke) that literally means customers who will spend a lot. Their consumption rate could be up to RM1, 500. Among the community at N3, they nickname the rank of these sofas as Datukship rank, where it is considered an upper class in the society.

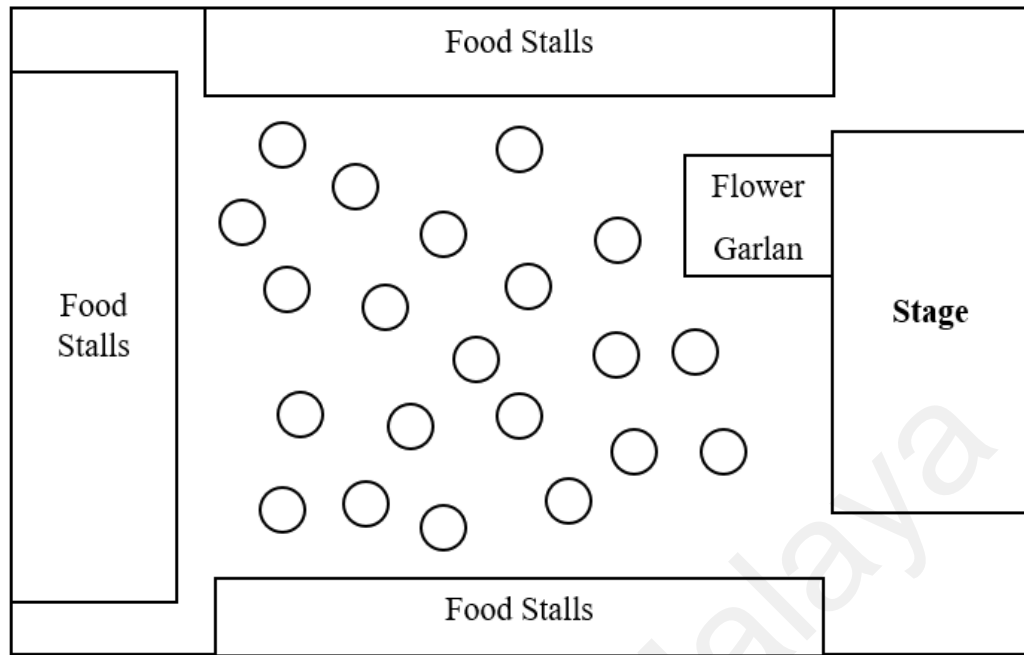
As mentioned by the general manager of N3, "face" (面子, mian zi) is a very important matter for they feel they have 'face' when they are here. They are considered to be the upper social hierarchy among the Chinese community. Most of the sofas are booked by the customers in advanced through either a mamasan, the general manager or one of the singers. Once the seat is booked, they will have a small sign on the table marking it is on reserved. If it is on an ordinary day where not many customers, these sofas are open to individuals or smaller groups too.



Figure 4.5: Layout of N3 *Diaohua Chang* (N3 Photo by author, November 10, 2017).

Either the first floor or the second floor, all the sofas are meant to bring satisfaction to the customers. In the *Diaohua Chang*, the term popularity (人气, *renqi*) and feel or mood of the atmosphere (气氛, *qifen*) are the core to the business. They believed that “when there is popularity, then only one can have a good atmosphere” (有人气就有气氛, *you renqi jiu you qifen*). Therefore, this contributes to the hanging flower sales for the singers as well.

Compared to the *Diaohua Chang* at food court such as the following layout illustrated by Chin (2015, p. 53):



The food court *Diaohua Chang* is much simpler and it is cheaper in terms of the cost of the venue, building, interior furnishing, such as plastic chairs and tables, and the food stalls show that it is a common hawker centre instead of air-conditioned restaurant.

4.2.5 *Diaohua Chang* work schedule

Along my observation at three nightclubs, researcher had experienced how the order of every night's performance and preparation for presenting the show to the audience or customers, where after analysis, coding of a general work schedule experienced at N1, N2 and N3 is listed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Work schedule

Time	Activity
9 pm	Arrival of singers
10 pm	Show – part 1
11. 15 pm	Clap, Clap, Sing session
12.15 am	Intermission
12.20am	Show – part 2
3am	Full ensembles

As the *Diaohua Chang* is a nightlife activity, the singers and the nightclub staffs worked late at night. Table 4.1 shows a general working routine of *Diaohua Chang* singers. Researcher recalled that the way the singers worked throughout the night was quite challenging for my fieldwork. As a student and researcher, researcher faced difficulty in getting enough sleep while conducting the autoethnographic study at the nightclubs.

During my experience at the *Diaohua Chang* preparation was done quite quickly when researcher was called to arrive late at the nightclub such as 9pm. Below is a detailed depiction of the activities and time involved:

- a) All singers are compulsory to reach the pub before 9 pm every day. Between 9 to 10pm, in an hour's time, the singers need to make sure that they are all dressed up with attractive gowns and for male singer, attractive suits. The female singer must also at this very hour complete themselves with full makeup while waiting for the hairstylist to do their hairdo.

- b) The first half of the show starts at 10 pm and last until 12:15 am daily. All the singers will perform according to the program planned.
- c) There will be a five to ten minutes' intermission after the first half of the show ends.
- d) The most exciting part of the whole show is the Clap, Clap, Sing (排排唱, *pai pai chang*) where all the singers will appear on the stage by standing in two or three rows accordingly after their name is introduced. They will usually sing some Taiwan songs along with the keyboard accompaniment. The Clap, Clap, Sing (排排唱, *pai pai chang*) lasts about an hour.
- e) The Clap, Clap, Sing session is subsequently followed by 20 minutes' intermission before the commencement of the second half of the show.
- f) All the singers will perform together during the end of the show at 3 am.

It is a norm for the singers to entertain the customers such as chit-chatting, drinking alcohols when it is not their turn to perform on stage. Compared to the *Diaohua Chang* schedule as documented by Chin (2015), the food court setting operates earlier than the nightclub ones.

Chin explained in her fieldwork record that the food court work schedule began at 8pm with the following:

- a) 8pm Performance of karaoke singing
- b) 9.30pm Cha Cha session
- c) 10.30pm Show
- d) 11.30pm Performance of karaoke singing

The food court *Diaohua Chang* ends at 12am while the nightclub ones' end at 3am.

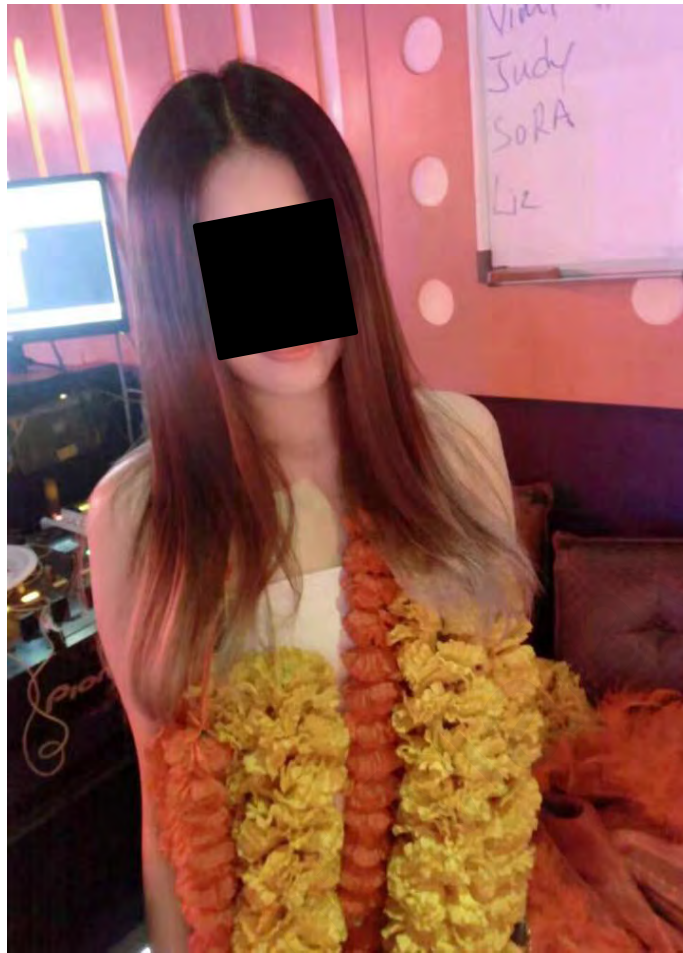
4.3 The act of *Diaohua* and its Price

In the author's participant observation at N1, N2 and N3, besides alcoholic beverages, the main income of *Diaohua Chang* is the sales of the flower garland from customers. The pricing of the flower garland is categorized into five types of flower according to colour:

- a) Red flower garland – RM 10
- b) Yellow flower garland – RM 50
- c) Flower garland with blue ribbon – RM 100
- d) Flower garland with pink ribbon – RM 200
- e) Flower garland with purple ribbon – RM 300

As the word *Diaohua* refers to hanging the flower and this is basically done when a customer bought, and approach the singer (while she is singing) and hang on her neck as a gift.

During the researcher's field visit at N1, an anonymous singer was willing to post for a photo at backstage after receiving flower garland from customer (see Fig. 4.5). In the picture, it is clear to see that the lower the price of the flower garland, the smaller the size it is. A yellow flower garland of RM50 is much bigger compared to the red one. In addition, a singer who walks off stage with more flower garland means she has a high popularity.



**Figure 4.6: Singer at N1 posted with red and yellow flower garland (Photo by
Author, May 15, 2015)**



Figure 4.7: Singer at N1 post with small crown and red flower garland (Photo by Author, May 15, 2015)

Besides flower garland as in the word *Diaohua* means, there are other items to be bought by customers and to give as a gift to the singers. The flower garland is just a basic one and belongs to the lowest price range. After the basic flower garland that range from RM 10 to RM 300 is the Imperial Crown ranging from:

- a) Small crown – RM 500
- b) Large crown – RM 1000

Figure 4.6 shows a singer wearing a crown. The crown is usually seen on singers who are more popular as it cost a high price. Besides the imperial crown, the highest category of gift that can be bought for the singers is the Regal Robe ranging from:

- a) Pink regal robe – RM 1, 314
- b) Gold regal robe – RM 3, 000
- c) Silver regal robe – RM 5, 000
- d) White regal robe – RM 10, 000
- e) Blue regal robe – RM 20, 000
- f) Red regal robe – RM 30, 000
- g) Peacock regal robe – RM 50, 000
- h) Black regal robe – RM 100, 000
- i) Grey regal robe – RM 100, 000

The Regal Robe is the most expensive ones, compared to the flower and the imperial crown. However, it is not the common one. The fact that the customers were willing to buy a gown to the singers, showed why foreign singers agreed to take the risk and work at the *Diaohua Chang* nightclub. In Figure 4.7 the researcher demonstrated wearing a gold regal robe and a large imperial crown. The flower garland, imperial crown and Regal Robe can be given to both female and male singers.



Figure 4.8: Author with gold regal robe and a large imperial crown (Photo taken by author (selfie), September 10, 2015).

Figure 4.8 displays a female singer who received a different colour robe and crown at N2 and Figure 4.9 show three singers parade and thank audience after receiving their robes at N2.

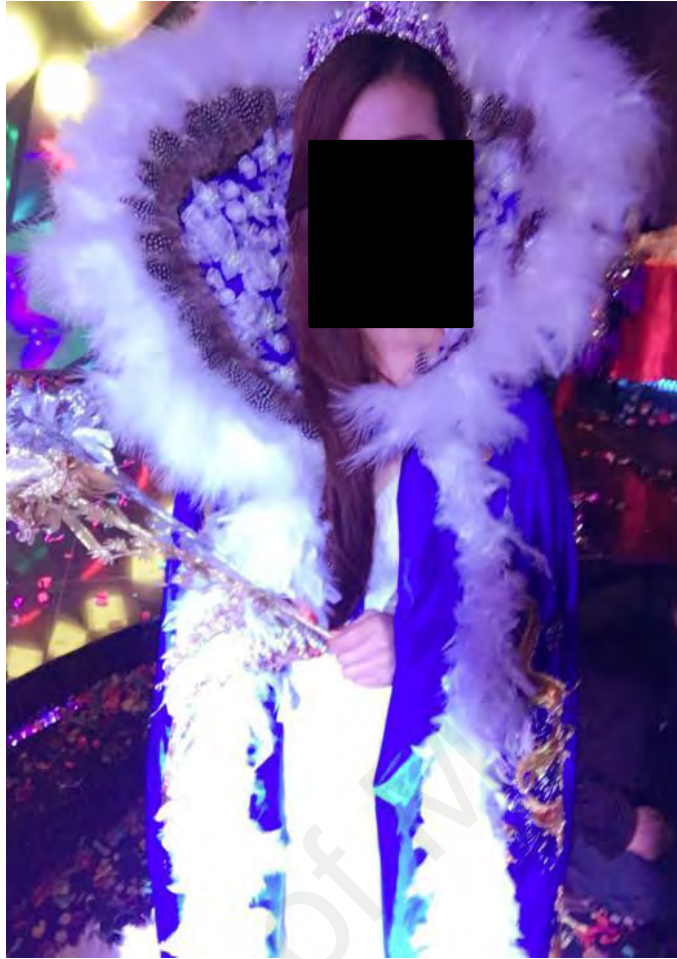


Figure 4.9: Imperial robe for RM 20,000 and a little crown for RM 500 (Photo by Author, October 7, 2016).



Figure 4.10: Three singers with robes (Photo taken by Author, November 1 , 2016)

As to induce more purchase, the *Diaohua Chang* has a culture of having the highlight of the show, that is a platform singing by all the singers at *Diaohua Chang* labelled as Clap, Clap, Sing (see Fig. 4.10). During this session, all the singers stand in a row on the stage, according to the director's arrangement. Although they were together, however, they perform one after another by doing a solo. The DJ or the host is responsible to foster the contact with the customers by encouraging them to buy the flower garlands for the singers as a token of their appreciation. One of the common dialoguing between the DJ or the host with the customers is: "Anyone is willing to pay higher to make our pretty ladies happier?!"



Figure 4.11: Clap, Clap, Sing (Photo taken by Author, October 7, 2016).

4.4 Repertoire Selection at *Diaohua Chang*

During researcher participation at all three nightclubs, it is noted that the repertoires selected for performance are based on the singers' preferences. Researcher noticed that the selection has a close reflection of the singers' age. Due to the singers age is ranging from 18 to 35 years old, the songs selections were from the various eras such as the 70s, 80s, and 90s. Among the popular choice are from Mandarin song (because most of the singers are from China), Cantonese songs, Minnan songs (Taiwan), Hakka songs, Malay songs (limited presentation by local singers) and English songs. Although the choices are based on the singers' personal preferences, however from the observation in this research, it demonstrated that customers' preferences are the main role in choosing the songs.

During the fieldwork, researcher observed that different customers have different expectations. Instead of good vocal skills, researcher found that the key factor in customer's preference over a singer is her appearance and the norms are female singers are of priority. Hence, it is not about the choice of repertoire.

As a classically vocal trained singer, researcher could tell that many singers are not well trained and they did not sing well. However, at *Diaohua Chang* it does not matter how good or bad her singing is, such customer's will be willing to buy flowers to support a female singer and moreover, if the female singer has a good physical appearance. As a male singer, researcher experienced the hardship of getting fans and preference. Thus, the connection of visual appearance and music may deliver a psychological effect (Loo & Loo, 2015).

In addition, aside from gender and physical attractiveness, the choice of songs selected by customers that researcher noticed was sometimes based on what happen off-stage. For some cases, the female singers initiate a deal with the customers, by asking their customers to request on the songs for them to sing. Flower will be offered to the female singer and as a return, the female singers will offer accompaniment after work for a supper or other activities.

Still, from researcher's observation, there are some popular numbers that are always staged at the *Diaohua Chang* researcher participated. Below are the songs where the singers and the customers usually choose from according to the era of popularity (see Table 4.2, Table 4.3, and Table 4.4).

Table 4.2: List of songs from the 60s and 70s

No.	Song Titles	Year	Original Singer
1.	往事只能回味 <i>Wang Shi Zhi Neng Hui Wei</i>	1970	尤雅 You Ya
2.	月亮代表我的心 <i>Yue Liang Dai Biao Wo De Xin</i>	1972	陈芳兰 Chen Fang Lan
3.	可爱的玫瑰花 <i>Ke Ai De Mei Gui Hua</i>	1974	欧阳菲菲 Ou Yang Fei Fei
4.	小城故事 <i>Xiao Cheng Gu Shi</i>	1978	邓丽君 Deng Li Jun
5.	甜蜜蜜 <i>Tian Mi Mi</i>	1980	邓丽君 Deng Li Jun
6.	爱你在心口难开 <i>Ai Ni Zai Xin Kou Nan Kai</i>	1981	邓菲菲 Deng Fei Fei
7.	大约在冬季 <i>Da Yue Zai Dong Ji</i>	1987	齐秦 Qi Qin

Table 4.3: List of songs from the 80s

No.	Song Titles	Year	Original Singer
1.	你怎么舍得我难过	1990	黄品源
	<i>Ni Zen Me She De Wo Nan Guo</i>		Huang Pin Yuan
2.	特别的爱给特别的你	1990	伍思凯
	<i>Te Bie De Ai Gei Te Bie De Ni</i>		Wu Si Kai
3.	浪人情歌	1992	伍佰
	<i>Lang Ren Qing Ge</i>		Wu Bai
4.	我的心好乱	1994	赵传
	<i>Wo De Xin Hao Luan</i>		Zhao Chuan
5.	你的名字我的姓氏	1996	张学友
	<i>Ni De Ming Zi Wo De Xing Shi</i>		Zhang Xue You
6.	朋友	1997	周华健
	<i>Peng You</i>		Zhou Hua Jian
7.	当	1998	动力火车
	<i>Dang</i>		Dong Li Huo Che

Table 4.4: List of songs from the 90s and the 2000s

No.	Song Titles	Year	Original Singer
1.	天路 <i>Tian Lu</i>	2001	韩红 Han Hong
2.	小微 <i>Xiao Wei</i>	2002	黄品源 Huang Pin Yuan
3.	童话 <i>Tong Hua</i>	2005	光良 Guang Liang
4.	姑娘我爱你 <i>Gu Niang Wo Ai Ni</i>	2009	索朗扎西 Suo Lang Zha Xi
5.	感动天感动地 <i>Gan Dong Tian Gan Dong Di</i>	2009	宇桐非 Yu Tong Fei
6	我的好兄弟 <i>Wo De Hao Xiong Di</i>	2011	高进, 小沈阳 Gao Jin . Xiao Shen Yang
7	万山之巔	2011	徐千雅

	<i>Wan Shan Zhi Dian</i>		Xu Qian Ya
8	许多年以后	2012	李佳霖
	<i>Xu Duo Nian Yi Hou</i>		Li Jia Lin
9.	兄弟抱一下	2013	庞龙
	<i>Xiong Di Bao Yi Xia</i>		Pang Long
10.	斑马斑马	2014	宋冬野
	<i>Ban Ma Ban Ma</i>		Song Dong Ye
11.	夜空中最亮的星	2014	张杰
	<i>Zhang Jie</i>		Zhang Jie

From the table above, the selection of songs ranged from the 70s, 80, 90s and 2000s of Mandarin popular music. It is noted that all the songs selection are the common popular songs represent from each of the eras. For instance, classic Mandarin pop song such as *Past Events We Can Only Remember and Savour* 《往事只能回味》, *Little Town Story* 《小城故事》, *The Moon Represents My Heart* 《月亮代表我的心》, are well known and a must repertoire in the 70s karaoke songs. No doubt, many customers like the songs especially customers aged 50 years old and over. Besides that, from the 80s are *Give My Special Love to the Special You* 《特别的爱给特别的你》, *How Can You Allow Me to be in Sorrow* 《你怎么舍得我难过》, and *My Heart is Very Confused* 《我的心好乱》 are among the typical repertoires representing the 80s. Songs like *My Good Brothers* 《我的好兄弟》, *Friends* 《朋友》, *Brothers Hug* 《兄弟抱一下》, are usually requested

by male customers to emphasis on their brotherhood as they enjoy drinking and get drunk at the pub.

It is not necessarily the singer need to sing very well to get patronage from the customers. It depends on what the community always mentioned, the timing that counts: the right time, the right song and the right audience. For instance, from my own experience, I noticed a generous regular customer whom I labelled here as Boss C (pseudonym) who likes the songs *Zebra, Zebra* 《斑马斑马》, *The Mountains* 《万山之巔》 and *Brightest Star in the Night Sky* 《夜空中最亮的星》.

Whenever he appears at N3, if these songs were sung, the singer will surely receive his huge appreciation and support of purchased gifts. Even as a male singer who always lose out to the competition among the female singers, there was a night researcher daringly attempted all his favourite songs once he appeared at the nightclub. After singing all his favourite numbers, researcher successfully received a robe of RM3, 000 from Boss C (see Figure 4.12).

Therefore, the choice of songs is proved to be determined by the audience preferences. As mentioned earlier, the timing is the key to a successful appearance on stage. Songs which is known by the customers are always a winning factor. As a researcher trained in classical music, researcher did not see the coherence of such theory at first. However, as researcher have gone through the participation with the *Diaohua Chang* committees, the truth of performing at a *Diaohua Chang* where the common saying of them is “Customers are the main target. They are the Gods!”



Figure 4.12: Author received a RM 3, 000 Royal Robe (July 30, 2017)

4.4.1 Popular Songs at *Diaohua Chang*

This section covers music analysis of the selected songs that remain at the core of attention and six songs were deemed as most popular among the audiences. During my participant observation, it is noted that the songs *My Good Brother* (我的好兄弟, wo de hao xiong di), *My Future is Not a Dream* (我的未来不是梦, wo de wei lai bu shi meng), *The Sea* (大海, da hai), *Boundless Oceans, Vast Skies* (海阔天空, hoi fut tin hung), *Missing your Night* (想你的夜, xiang ni de ye), and *Don't Think of Me* (你就不要想起, ni jiu bu yao xiang qi wo) received the most applause and attention.

My Good Brother is among the songs that received the most attention at all the *Diaohua Chang* during the research duration. It is composed by Gao Jin, who was born in 1982, a Chinese pop singer and a music producer, from the Mainland China. The song was released on April 15, 2011 in the album *Can't Afford It* (Baidu, 2018). This song was sung by Gao Jin and his good friend Xiao Shenyang, or also known as his good brother. Xiao Shenyang is an actor, singer, director and moderator, who was born in 1981 (Baidu, 2018). Both of these friends soon became good friends and continued to embark on a successful entertainment career together. In 2009, Gao Jin set up his own music studio called "美高音乐工作室" mei gao yin yue gong zuo shi and composed a song especially for Xiao Shenyang, titled *My name is Xiao Shenyang*. This is followed by *My Good Brother* which turned out to be a major hit in the Chinese community. According to Baidu (2018), this song was written based on Gao Jin personal experience of having a good brother supporting him in times of difficulties. His song celebrates the friendship and meaning of brotherhood in manhood.

In the recording analysis, the intro associated with masculinity sound. Male dominant instruments such as harmonica, electric guitar, acoustic guitar and drum is used to project stereotypical characters such as authority and robustness. Gao Jin sung with empathy and

concerned for his brother. Verse 1 is sung by Gao Jin, while verse 2 is sung by Xiao Shenyang; mimicking an interaction between Gao Jin and Xiao Shenyang. Gao Jin sung “When you are in glorious moment, Let me sing a song for you, My good brother, Please tell me your difficulties...” and followed by Xiao Shenyang “When you need me, Let me be with you. My good brother, Please tell me your difficulties...”. The tension built up when the Xiao Shenyang sung “...at least you have me”, with “me” (see Figure 4.13 as circled in red) emphasized in a long note value (see Figure 4.13 in blue colour box), followed by chorus section with both voices singing together, which was sung in *forte*, creating a louder and more energetic mood. Towards the end of the song, the chorus keeps repeating many times, with an additional *falsestto* part “like an old song” sung by Xiao Shenyang (see Figure 4.13b).

During the performance at N1 on 20th November 2015, I sang this song to the audience. On a reflexive account, I particularly like the song because it reminds me of friendship with my closest friends, or more like ‘brother’ to me. It is common to mainland Chinese where we call closest friends as brother or “xiong di.” Since the audiences are male-dominated, I found that the song successfully attracted their attention and many of the audiences were excited by the song.

As I observed, once the intro started to sound, they immediately called upon their friends to get ready to sing with a glass of wine or beer ready in hand. Chorus, was the section where the audience will sing their heart out with me. The male friends will look at each other and cheers a glass of wine or beer every time the phrase “Like a glass wine, like an old song” occurred (see Figure 4.13 in red colour box). Before the song ends, the *falsestto* part (see Figure 4.13b), some male audience were so amazed and scream their heart out at the phrase “like an old song.” The song ends with cheers a glass wine or even hugging among the male friends.

21 坚强 的生活 - , 哭过 笑过 至少 你 还有我 。 朋 友

23 的 情 谊 呀 比 天 还 高 比 地 还 - 辽 - 阔 , 那 些 岁 月 我 们 一 定 会 记 -

26 得 - , 朋 友 的 情 谊 呀 我 们 今 生 最 大 的 难 得 , 像 一 杯

29 酒 像 一 首 - 老 歌 - 。

The musical score is for the song "My Good Brother". It consists of four systems of music. The first system (measures 21-23) has a blue box around the melody for "哭过 笑过 至少 你 还有我" and a red circle around the final note of this phrase. The second system (measures 23-26) continues the melody. The third system (measures 26-29) has a red box around the melody for "像 一 杯". The fourth system (measures 29-31) has a red box around the melody for "酒 像 一 首 - 老 歌 - 。

Figure 4.13: *My Good Brother*

最大的 难 得 , 像 一 杯 - 酒 像 一 首 老 歌 - 。

This figure shows a close-up of the falsetto section of the song. It features a red box around the melody for "像 一 杯 - 酒 像 一 首 老 歌 - 。

Figure 4.13b: Falsetto section

During my observation, another song that is very popular at the *Diaohua Chang* is *My Future is Not a Dream*. Lyrics written by Chan Jiali, music composed by Weng Xiaoliang and arranged by Chen Zhiyuan, while Zhang Yusheng was the singer that popularized the song. He was born in Magong City, Penghu County, Taiwan on June 7, 1966. Published in 1988, this song portrayed a young-looking image of Zhang Yusheng. This song was about supporting the revolution of the new generation born in the 1970s. The lyrics reflects the younger generation of that time tried to prove that they are different from the previous generation and called themselves the “new new human”. Although they were born in a peaceful era without struggling with war as in the past, they proved that they are capable doing things without relying on their parents. It is an inspirational song inspiring this new generation to live a life full of hopes and dreams, without wasting their youthfulness.

Zhang Yusheng youthful voice fit with the narration of the lyrics as the song is related to young people. Moreover, his voice was like a calling or declaration to all the youth out there to live up their spirit and follow their dreams. This song was in the Stars Compilation (群星合辑, qun xing he ji), title The Six Friends (六个朋友, liu ge peng you) released by UFO Records (Taiwan) Co Ltd.) in 1988. Due to its popularity among the Chinese community, Tiger Hu (胡彦斌, Hu Yanbin) also made a cover of the song in 2004. The song’s popularity returned again when it was sung in the reality singing competition show *I’m a Singer* (我是歌手, wo shi ge shou) by Jason Zhang Jie, which is a China singing competition program year in the year 2014.

In the recording analysis, the main theme in the verse was sung in a sentimental manner. The singer calling the listener to listen to his song by asking questions such as, “Are you the same like me? Confused and struggling with work and life? Are you busy pursuing your dreams like me? Are you lost as I do?” These questions lifted up the spirit

in search for the answers of life, where the lyrics emphasized on “believing ones dream, without bothering what the other said and never forget about oneself.” The song started in 4/4 time, however, it changed to 2/4 time at “Commitment to oneself” (对爱的执著, *duì ài de zhízhuó*) and changed again to 4/4 time (see Figure 4.14 as circled). The highlight of the song was Zhang Yusheng voice hitting the A note in semibreve (see Figure 4.14 in blue box), an interval of Perfect 5th between the D to the A. This produced a high spirit transition to the chorus. The chorus accelerated further with shorter note value drum beat to live up the spirit mood; from minim, minim to crotchet, crotchet, crotchet, crotchet in 4/4 time. Such changes infused a change of the tempo and the mood from a sentimental song to a high-spirited and inspirational song.

During the performance at N1 on 5th March 2016, I sang this song to the audience. The song is a challenging one due to its high A note in semibreve; a Perfect 5th gap between the D to the A. When singing this song, I noticed that audience were paying full attention to me. While singing, I experienced the audience paid more attention, compared to other songs, and they gave me a huge applause every time I hit the high pitch (see Figure 4.14 bracketed in blue border). When it came to the repetition of the chorus (see Figure 4.14 bracketed in red border), the audience joined in and sang together every time when the chorus repeated. Perhaps, the musical rhythm and repetition have an effect in memory (Ee, Piaw, and Ying, 2015) and the audience remember the lyrics very well. Some of them stood up and clap to the beat, and gave a huge applause at the end of the song.

The image displays a musical score for the song "My Future is Not a Dream" in G major, 2/4 time. The score is divided into three systems, each with piano accompaniment and vocal melody. The first system (measures 1-4) includes the lyrics "对爱的执着..." and "我知道 我的未来不是梦,". The second system (measures 5-8) includes the lyrics "认真地过每一分钟," and "我的为来不是梦,". The third system (measures 9-12) includes the lyrics "我的心跟着希望在动,". The score is annotated with various markings: red circles around the first and second measures of the first system, a blue box around the second measure of the first system, a red box around the entire second system, a red box around the first measure of the third system, and purple brackets around the first and last measures of the third system. Chord symbols (Em, A, Bm, A/C#, D, A/E, A, A11, D, Bm, G, G, D, A) are placed above the vocal line. The tempo marking "rit." is present under the first measure of the second system.

En A Bm A/C# D A/E A A11 D

对爱的 执 着...

我 认真地过每一分钟,

我知道 我的未来不是梦,

rit.

5 Bm G

我 认真地过每一分钟,

我的为来不是梦,

9 G D A

我的 心 跟着 希望 在 动。

Figure 4.14: *My Future is Not a Dream*

Another song that captured the most attention during my fieldwork was *The Sea*, is another song sung by Zhang Yusheng, a prominent figure in the Mandarin music industry. Lyrics are by Chen Dali and music is composed by Chen Dali and Chen Xiu-nan. This song is written as a remembrance of Zhang Yusheng's sister, who died from drowning (Tian Tian Kuai Bao, 2018). She was a dear sister to him, where both equally shared the same dream to form their own band one day. When Zhang Yusheng went to the beach with his friends, Chen Dali and Chen Xiu-nan, his friends' noticed that when he looked at the sea, his eyes were full of despair. For Zhang Yusheng, the sea was a reflection of his dear sister. Thus, Chen Dali and Chen Xiu-nan decided to write this song especially for him to help cope with his grief (Daily Express, 2018). Published in 1992, this song has won the 2018 Global Chinese Golden Melody Awards. Well known for his singing ability in high pitch, Zhang Yusheng's unique voice successfully captivate listeners with a mixed sense of loneliness and confusion.

In the recording analysis, the song was in 4/4 time and tempo in *andante*. This sentimental song used 'sea' as the main setting. The song begins with solo piano playing and transits to Zhang Yusheng voice, singing in a melancholy tone. Based on a pentatonic scale, a typical Chinese traditional musical style, this song is filled with sorrow. Zhang Yusheng narrates his situation related to the setting, 'sea'; "You are slowly disappearing from the distant beach, The original blurred face is gradually clear, What do you want to say? I don't know where to start. Only put it in the bottom of my heart". Texture becomes thicker in the second verse with the additional instruments such as bass guitar and tambourine. The drum set is introduced in the chorus and follows with an electric guitar solo section, bursting with emotion. Before the song ends, repetition of the chorus with electric guitar as well as with the drum set and piano continue to support the dynamic expression, impressing the listeners. The song wraps up with piano solo.

During the performance at N2 on 28th May 2016, I noticed that the song was considered as the top choice among the customers. It is a familiar song that customers will be singing along with the singer on stage, especially the chorus part. The most dramatic part was where customers dramatically sang along the lyrics “my love, please take it all away.” (see Figure 4.15), emphasizing the word “love” in five counts (see Figure 4.15 as circled in blue). Watching the audience emotions, it may be sufficed to say that they were able to relate to the lyrics of the song, as preference of music may reveal a sense of reflection and identity (Ying, Lung, Chiat, & Hee, 2013).

33 远, 如果大海能够带走我的哀愁, 就像

36 带走每条河流, 所有受过的伤, 所有

39 流过的泪, 我的爱, 请全都带走。

Figure 4.15: *The Sea* chorus

During the performance at N2 on 17th September 2016, I found another song, *Boundless Ocean, Vast Skies*, that was equally popular among this *Diaohua Chang* audience. The most prominent about this song is after 2 minutes or half way of the song, at the bridge section. The audience were very excited at that juncture, and with clenched-fist salutes, beating to the beat of the song (Figure 4.16 in red box). This is followed by the chorus, singing “Forgive me, I’ve been unruly, untamed freedom-lover all my life, for I fear too that I might fall down someday...”, the audience will be singing with the singer (Figure 4.16 in red box). The clenched-fist salutes continued to the end of the song. The excitement continued when the electric guitar solo played. Some audience will be standing, while others will be sitting on the sofas.

Boundless Oceans, Vast Skies, was published in year 1993, is a song popularised by Beyond, a Hong Kong rock band formed in 1983. This band consists of Wong Ka Kui, the lead vocalist and songwriter, Paul Wong, the lead guitarist, Yip Sai Wing, percussionist and Wong Ka Keung, the bass guitarist (Wikipedia, 2018). Published in 1993, this pop rock genre was composed and sung by Wong Ka Kui personally. Originally it is written in Cantonese, where Wong Ka Kui expressed the challenges and disappointment they faced in the Hong Kong and Japan music industry (Baidu, 2018). For instance, in Hong Kong, they were disappointed that they were restricted to compose for certain genre only, due to the market demand. Thus, they fought for freedom to compose. It is a song full of inspirational spirit for listeners to dare to dream beyond the impossibilities, which covers the freedom issues. This pop rock genre song is recognised as among the popular karaoke choice in KTV as well as people’s hearts. It is the pinnacle of Cantonese songs, popular among the Chinese community. It is also highly recognised as a song for demonstration in several political rallies such as the 2014 Hong Kong Protest,

Bersih 4 rally and as well as a song for unity in the Artistes 512 Fund Raising Campaign; with a change of the original lyrics.

In the recording analysis, the keyboard plays the intro, inviting Wong Ka Kui's raw voice to express his disappointment which follows with a short echo by the band members at the end of the verse. The music texture gets thicker in the chorus section, where an electric bass and a drum set are added in the second verse. There is a solo keyboard section before the entry of the bridge. Although the bridge is quite short, the impact of the song is deep. The dynamics gets louder with heavier drum sound, while the ti-ti-ta rhythmic played by the strings as the bass, supports Wong Kah Wai high pitched scream-out voice to segue into the chorus (see Figure 4.16 in blue box). This turn, the chorus fills with strings playing the melody with the band's voice; producing a more dramatic tone with Wong Kah Wai screaming "wo oh oh...." The song ends with a solo electric guitar filled with distortion effects and crashing cymbals.

66

仍然自由自我 永远高唱我歌 走遍千里, 原谅

70

我这一生不羁放纵 爱自由, 也会怕有一天会跌倒,

73

oh no-, 被齐了理想, 谁人都可以

76

那会怕有一天只你共我。。

Figure 4.16: *Boundless Oceans, Vast Skies*, bridge and chorus

The fifth song that received the most attention at *Diaohua Chang* N2, and N3 is the song *Missing your Night*, released in 2009. It was written and sung by Guan Yu, a singer as well as a music producer. Born in 1981, Guan Yu is from Jilin Province of China. The story behind the song *Missing your Night* is about Guan Yu's personal life. Due to his lack of time pursuing his music career. Guan Yu broke up with his girlfriend. This led Guan Yu in pain and loneliness. With this personal experience, he expressed it through his music and wrote down this song. This song makes listeners feel so emotionally sad about a man's love confession, sincerely to the woman he missed so much.

In the recording analysis, in the first verse, the singer narrated in a calm manner about the days he broke up with his girlfriend. Capturing listeners' attention, he continued to express his heart broken feelings, emptiness and regret. The outburst emotion increased when he started singing "if only, this whole relationship is able to start all over again, he will give up everything for the sake of her". This led to a deep emotional feeling effect at the chorus *Missing your Night* (see Figure 4.17). The singer repeated again *Missing your Night* with the used of "wo" on the G# note (see Figure 4.17b as circled) to agonize the love and pain hidden in his heart. At the climax, the singer used falsetto (see Figure 4.17b in red box), highlighting the intensity of feeling lost and despair, hoping his love will return. The style used in the song is a mixture of R&B and jazz.

During the performance at N3 on 7th July 2017, I sung this song to the audience. I noticed that audience would pay full attention when this song was sung compared to others. When the intro started to play, the whole scene seems to be quiet. I reckoned that with the silence once the introductory passage sounded, it means the audience like the

song very much and paid attention to it. When it came to the chorus, I felt that there was a strange silence and pause of action in the whole scene, including the waiter and waitresses. Everyone stopped from doing their work or chit-chatting. Based on the behavior and response, I gathered that this must be one of their favourite song and I received a huge applause at the end of the song. I also noticed that during the falsetto part (see Figure 4.17b), many of the audiences were so emotionally of what I noticed from their facial expression.



Figure 4.17: *Missing your Night*, transit to the chorus.

22

你 心 里 还 能 否 为 我 改 边, woo, 想 你 的 夜 - 球 你 让

25

我 再 爱 你 一 遍, 让 爱 在 回 到 原 - 点。 想

Figure 4.17b: *Missing your Night, Falsetto*

Don't Think of Me, is the sixth song that received the most attention at all the *Diaohua Chang*. Sing in a woman's perspective, this song originally sung by Hebe (Tian Fu Zhen) a Taiwanese singer. Released in 2013, the lyrics are by Shi Rencheng, and music composed by Yang Zipu and Liu Dajiang. The lyricist wrote the lyrics specially for Hebe's voice. Her voice has the capacity to project an honest view on some common issues faced in love, which include the heart pining with unrequited love. This song is mainly about flashing back memories after separation. Instead of forgetting the person whom she used to love, the thoughts and memories of him torture her. Hebe believes that this song is suitable to those who seek for a place to vent their heartbreaking feelings as well as healing their soul.

In the recording analysis, played at a gentle pace and a time signature of 4/4, this song is relatively slow to start off. Mimicking the early stage of breakup. For instance, as mentioned in the lyrics "feeling loneliness, unbearable pain when saw him, a touch will stumble her, as if awoken from a deep sleep on an iceberg, and even a smile for afar could even bring tears to her". Sung in forte (loud), the chorus, Hebe vent her feeling of confusion; "Obviously, you love me very much, there is no reason this love is not working, as long as you dare, why should we give up", (see Figure 4.18) and she ends with an advice, asking him not to think of her, because by then he will surely regret.

During a few performances at N3 in 2018, I noticed that this song is considered very special to a specific group; the wealthy customers in the *Diaohua Chang*. They are known to be very concerned with their "face" (面子, mian zi), a Chinese expression that denotes dignity and pride. I believe that, even the rich man will experience unrequited love. Thus, when this song is sung, these groups of wealthy customers will relate their experienced and emotional. The chorus lyrics are the most touching part (see Figure 4.18) which recalls their memories and even the pain in them. I noticed that there is a changed in the

male customers face. Their faces showed signs of distress. During my fieldwork, I found that some female singers even shed a little tear due to this overwhelming song. This song is a mean of catharsis for them.

The image displays a musical score for the chorus of a song, spanning measures 26 to 35. The score is written for a piano accompaniment and a vocal line. The vocal line is in the treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is in the bass clef. The lyrics are in Chinese. The score is divided into five systems, each starting with a measure number (26, 29, 31, 33, 35). The lyrics are: 明明你也很愛我 沒理由愛不到結果, 只要 (Measure 26); 你敢不糯 若憑什麼我們要錯過, (Measure 29); 夜長夢很多, 你就不要想起我 (Measure 31); 到時候最好別來要認錯, 你就不, 想我到 (Measure 33); 要, 想我到 瘋掉! (Measure 35). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and bar lines. There are also some purple markings on the score, possibly indicating specific musical features or editing points.

26 明明你也很愛我 沒理由愛不到結果, 只要

29 你敢不糯 若憑什麼我們要錯過,

31 夜長夢很多, 你就不要想起我

33 到時候最好別來要認錯, 你就不, 想我到

35 要, 想我到 瘋掉!

Figure 4.18: *Don't Think of Me* chorus.

4.5 *Diaohua Chang's Revenue*

The price of the flower garland, imperial crown and regal robe shows that the singers at *Diaohua chang* have potential in making a good income. In the author's participant observation at N3, *Diaohua Chang* singers consists of Malaysian and China singers. Working at *Diaohua Chang* involves only the night time and singers' working hours usually ranged from 10 pm to 3 am. The singers do not receive a stable income as their salaries varied depends on the quality of their stage appearances.

According to a manager at N3, a charming female singer usually draws more attention from the male patrons. So, their salaries are approximately RM 8, 000 per month. On the contrary, a plain looking female singer salary can range around RM 4, 000 per month. As with the job that involve in a nightclub setting, the singers do not only sing, and they need to accompany customers to chat and drink, and at the same time, trying to build fondness of the customers so that they are able to receive extra pay in the form of flower garlands, imperial crown or regal robe.

The item purchased by customers as a gift to the singer is the commission that the singer will receive as a reward of her performances. Usually, the commission is divided into 3:7 which means 30% belongs to the company and 70% belongs to the singers. Thus, the total salary of some singers can be as high as RM 10, 000 including commission received. During author's experience at the nightclubs, author heard of a history record that there was a female singer who took back a salary of RM 200, 000 in a month. Whether it is a truth or a myth, this attracts more singers to work at *Diaohua Chang*.

Shane, who is a host at N3 explained the reasons behind his involvement in the *Dioahua Chang* in Malaysia (Personal communication, October 8, 2017) is that it is

difficult to find a job in China and the situation is the same even for college or university graduate. He explained that “the hardship in China and the high living cost makes it difficult to survive in my home country.” He added that if one intends to get married, that comes together with buying a house, a car and all wedding expenses, it seems like problems, including the hardship in looking for a job can never make that comes true.

As a Chinese myself, author understand that back home, a small house of just 70 meters per square cost 70 million yuan or more. Therefore, many Chinese came to Malaysia to work at *Diaohua Chang* as this is part of the reason, and they are willing to take the risk as illegal workers although they live in fear of police detainment.

In Shane’s case, he does not obtain any diploma certificate. Thus, makes his job scope only limited to as being a waiter or other low-income part-time jobs. “It is impossible to survive in China without skills like me,” said Shane (*ibid.*). He found the opportunity of working at *Diaohua Chang* via a friend who introduced him and it was new to him. He was immediately attracted to the salary and he admitted that he joined the industry without any hesitation. Moreover, he likes to sing.

The salary for a host differs from other singers. Host salary is on a fixed salary basis. Shane’s basic salary is RM 3, 500. In addition to this, an average of RM 120 per day can be earned from the flower sales. The host takes 60%, while the company takes 40% in the ratio of 6:4.

As for male singers, salary per month is about RM 8, 000 to RM 12,000 with the commission the ration of 7:3. For Shane, his earning is usually about RM 5,600 to RM 8,400. Thus, the total sum of his salary per month can be up to approximately <RM 10, 000.

Jane on the other hand is a female hostess explained that “I came to join the *Diaohua Chang* is because of the urge to earn money to support my family” (personal communication, October 8, 2017). She is from the Northeastern of China, where the climate is cold throughout the year. Due to such geographical climate, the job scope in her place is limited and she found hardship in her role as a married woman whom is expected to be a good wife, a good mother, and at the same time given the duty to take care of the children and family.

She explained that her husband could only earn 2000 yuan per month, which is not enough to support their family. It was a hardship during that time. Therefore, she left no choice but in search of a job to generate income for her family. One of her friends introduced her to this business. She believes she is fit for the job. She confidently said, “I am beautiful, capable to drink, and love to sing” during an interview with her.

She added that it was not easy for a foreigner like her to work aboard. However, the high income has attracted her to take the risk to work in this field. In this field, a woman singer has particularly earned more than a man singer. She revealed that her monthly income is approximately RM 30,000 which is equivalent to 200,000 yuan, or even more. Jane explained that her deal with N3 is based on the ratio of 8:2. 80% of the gift given by customers belongs to her and another 20% is for the company.

However, the difference between the male and female salary has its reasons. Many new comers may not know the hardship that a female singer has to face. Their working hours are not only during working hours. They have extended working hours or overtime to accompany customers for a private dinner, play games or even sexual activities. Thus, it is hard for a female singer with family to face this kind of situation. She shared her experience that, there was a customer who came to *Diaohua Chang* just to look for a woman or a girl to accompany. Moreover, he has a very awkward personality; unfriendly,

cold expression and never spoken to any person. Except, when he picks his favourite singer, he will speak to her personally and offering his deal. Jane recalled what the man told her, “Will you accompany me through the night? If yes, I will hang RM 3,000 for your next performance. If not, then I won’t hang any flowers for you” and she explained that she had such experience before, and she rejected the deal in fear for her safety.

4.6 Identify and Social Issues at *Diaohua Chang*

Via the analysis in Section 4.2 to 4.5, it is gathered that the conduct of *Diaohua Chang* has resulted in the following functions and social issues:

1. Illegal Sex Business
2. Male singers’ Identity at *Diaohua Chang*
3. Racial dominated industry
4. Promotion platform for local artist
5. Illegal Foreign Workers

During the observations and interviews, the majority of the customers are the male patrons who enjoy the accompaniment of young and sexy female singers to relax during this “happy hour”; after a hectic working day. Nevertheless, the female singers at the nightclubs I attended did not imply any explicit sexual service at the *Diaohua Chang*, but singers have the freedom in choosing to provide extra service, in this sense which means sexual service or to become a temporary girlfriend to these married male-customers based

on the extra reward the male patrons gave them. Some of the male patrons are constantly looking for sexy and beautiful girls who are ready to be called for “extra services.”

One of the nights when I was at N3, I witnessed a male customer mentioned to a female singer “I will give you flowers garland that worth RM3000, would you like to be my girlfriend?” (July 3, 2017). From the observations and communication with the singers, it is clear that the role of the female singer is more dominant than the male singer because of the hidden sexual business. The authority of male singer seemed to have lessened due to the fact that the nature of the *Diaohua Chang* which serves as an entertainment and helps to offer pleasure insights to men.

Thus, this leads to a discussion on the identity of the male singer at a *Diaohua Chang*. Apart from having a real ability to sing, a male singer will not be the common straight male customers’ preference and therefore, he needs to have extra skills such as a fluent talker and an ability to drink, as a heavy drinker to please the customers. In comparison with a female singer, regardless of singing capability, the male customers are willing to pay a huge amount for the flower garlands to the female singers or buying drinks for them if the singer is physically attractive.

According to Stone (2015), the subsistence of gender issues recurring in different occasions. In the case of *Diaohua Chang*, the domination of female singers in this entertainment field with mostly male patrons had caused the place deemed as breeding grounds for illicit commercial sex practices. While the minority of the male singers in every *Diaohua Chang* are rarely being supported by the customers in terms of flower garlands. Due to the fact that female singer is the favor of the patrons where the majority of them are men, the value of the male singer at *Diaohua Chang* is depreciated in this context. At one occasion at N3, I bravely asked a customer about giving the male singer a chance of appreciation or flower garlands but returned with “Both of us are men, and

our body is the same, is there anything I need from him?” (Personal communication with customer, July 10, 2017).

Another issue observed is that the *Diaohua Chang* industry is racially dominated by the Chinese and Indians customers. From the observation and various interviews with the subjects in this study, the result suggests that most of the patrons comprise of Chinese and Indians, but there is seldom any Malay customer. In Malaysia, the state Sha'riah law prohibited muslim from alcoholic drink consumption (Sabiah Ahmad, 2007), therefore, it is a norm to see an absence of Malay patronage at the *Diaohua Chang* night club that comes with mainly alcohol drink. The second reason being that the *Diaohua Chang* is a venue of Chinese popular song performance, therefore, it is natural the participation of audience from other races is lacking of.

As discussed in previous section, the performances at *Diaohua Chang* brought back some oldies and current popular songs. From the observation and interviews in this research reflects on the *Diaohua Chang* the integration of older and modern popular songs form where this place fosters the contact of the traditional *shidaiqu* singing as well as to expand the participants' social worlds beyond the walls of ballroom singing in old times were now replaced by *Diaohua Chang*.

The oldies social dance was also being replaced by DJ dance music. This appears to indicate that certain artistic and creative aspects of *shidaiqu* ballroom singing are transformed during this integration process. The culture is being reframed, restructured, and reprocess by this community. The cultural practice of *Diaohua Chang* and oldies ballroom singing reflects two articulations of life, whereby a certain form of ritual from a bygone era is being reframed and transformed into a more contemporary and modern environment.

Apart from that, although *Diaohua Chang* is performed mostly by the amateur singers, sometimes, there are special promotion and occasion hosted by professional local singers. It is a norm that, *Diaohua Chang* consists of amateur singers where the majority of them are not musically well trained. However, occasionally the pub owner or the General Manager will invite some professional singers or showgirls to perform at their pub. Apart from entertainment place, the *Diaohua Chang* such as N3 serves as a marketing venue for the artists to promote their released CD. Artists will have their promotion campaigns for their newly released albums at *Diaohua Chang*, as part of the event at the pub. Other than performing their original work, the artist will also sing the cover version work by the other singers too.

Finally, the social problem caused by *Diaohua Chang* is the illegal foreign worker. The high salary-based *Diaohua Chang* attracts many foreigners willing to take the risk to work at such venue. The knowledge of police raids did not stop them, as perhaps the monetary attraction is too high. Thus, *Diaohua Chang* gave a very negative impression to the public.

Via virtual ethnography by visiting e-forum and blog posts, it is gathered that the way netizen wrote about *Diaohua Chang* resembles something funny in a much derogatory sense. Funny in a way that some may joke over the act of hanging flower over the singer while knowing that there is a hidden agenda in terms of sexual business.

Some viewed *Diaohua Chang* as a place for vulgar ‘uncle’ looking for girls, meaning old men looking for sexual pleasure (see cn.cari.com.my, 2016). While there was one who posted for help that his girlfriend is working at such venue (see appledaily.com 2013). Another post shows that the local perception of the *Diaohua Chang* as a pornographic industry (see cn.cari.com.my, 2016).

Along virtual fieldwork, quite many perceived *Diaohua Chang* as a place for the elderly (Tan, 2016). They also think that it is a venue for men who come for female singers to accompany them for drinking and music listening session and that they have no interest in the performances. Usually, the singers in this pub do not sing that well and what they presented was a performance that has no expression at all with their eyes are glued to the TV screen (karaoke) when singing (*ibid.*). However, in author's own experience at the research sites in nightclub setting, probably due to the higher fee, the performers sang better and the lyrics were by memory, without the condition as how Tan described.

As mentioned, the local e-forum cari.com.my show many netizens posts on *Diaohua Chang* and according to a post by Dream Seaker (2016), the function of *Diaohua* performance is merely to attract customers to buy flower garlands for them. The more flower garlands received, the more commissions will be expected. Besides flower garlands, there are also crowns to be purchased for the female singers. In his experience, the average cost of RM 50 for a flower garland up to RM 200 for a crown and from author's sites visit, these belongs to the cheaper venue and compared to the nightclub ones, the latter is much more expensive where singers can make more money.

In a post at cn.cari.com.my, a netizen stated his curiosity about *Diaohua Chang* singers as public relation officer (see Fig. 4.19).



Figure 4.19: Web post: Question regarding *Diaohua Chang*

The conversation was translated as:

“When I was in Taiwan, I went to nightclubs too, but there were no *Diaohua Chang*. If we are looking for girls [prostitute] we go to the hotel and the girls at the hotel is on sale or you can bring them out for business. I really have no any idea about *Diaohua Chang* and also don’t understand about how *Diaohua* Public Relation (PR) officer works. Therefore, I am confused. Brother, can you explain about *Diaohua Chang* PR...”

The answer was provided by Zhibie (2016) as:

“I had been to common *Diaohua Chang*. There are many uncles watching beautiful girls. On the stage you can see a group of girls are singing and dancing (not actual dance, but just moving their hands and feet). The uncles below the stage will start choosing their preferred beauty. After the singing was done, the host will announce: for example, if you think you have more feeling for girl number 1, then you can buy

the flower garland and put on her head [hang on her neck]. If your chosen beauty happens to be tonight's champion, and you also happen to be the top contributor [flower garland], then you two [singer and contributing customer] can have private affair that is not restricted to this venue and this is up to the two of you.”

Zhibei (2016) added that the girl can also decline the request by the customer for their ‘private affair’ and he added a line that if he is wrong about that he hopes anyone can rectify the information. In other posts, the netizen also added the case that depicted the scenario at a *Diaohua Chang* by revealing that the female singers will ask for their customers to buy them a tequila, which cost about RM 25 or RM 50 for a shot and the audience are full of ‘uncles’ watching beautiful women performing on stage. To Zhibei, the act of singing with a little dancing step is like a bidding activity as these ‘uncles’ will choose which female singers to win that night. He will spend lots of money on her by buying the garlands for her. If the beauty chosen won as the champion of that night, then the uncle will be able to have a private chat or even deal with her.

In another e-forum Cforum.cari.com there was a comment made by someone who claimed he is a police officer shared his experience in detaining these people. He compared the local and foreign singers at the venue by stating that the local girls are not so entertaining or not so fun compared to the foreign singers. The local girls will usually ask the customers to buy them a drink. If someone purchases the flower for them, they will disappear after the show, or probably give excuses such as going to the toilet and never return (Cforum.cari.com, 2016).

During my fieldwork, author did hear comments saying that in Kuala Lumpur, the most affordable and fun *Diaohua Chang* belongs to the Vietnamese ‘field.’ Particularly, in Cheras Yulek and Cheras Business Park. Among the *Diaohua* community, it is

common knowledge that some female singers even offer ‘physical touch service’ and overtime (OT) with their customers after the show (Dream Seaker, 2016).

Therefore, the *Diaohua* industry is very closely related to prostitution. In other words, the function of the sing-song performance is used in a way to hide the fact that prostitution is going on illegally, and therefore, police raids are common.

4.7 Conclusion

As a summary, *Diaohua Chang* at nightclub setting is different from the nature of *getai* and food court *Diaohua Chang*. The activity of singing songs at *getting* or song hall resembles the nightclub in the 1930s, when the Western influence came to China and especially Shanghai. Nightclub in a sense, form a nightlife and replaced tea rooms.

At *Diaohua Chang*, the audience came to watch singing performances. Compared to earlier studies such as Chin (2015) and *Ko-tai* studies such as by Tan (1984), when the *Diaohua* was placed in a nightclub setting, the singing performances was held at a place where alcoholic drinks and socializing becomes the key function along watching music performance. *Diaohua* at a food court setting has different function where customers having meals and enjoy performances at the same time. Figure 4.20 shows the comparison between the two *Diaohua Chang* setting:

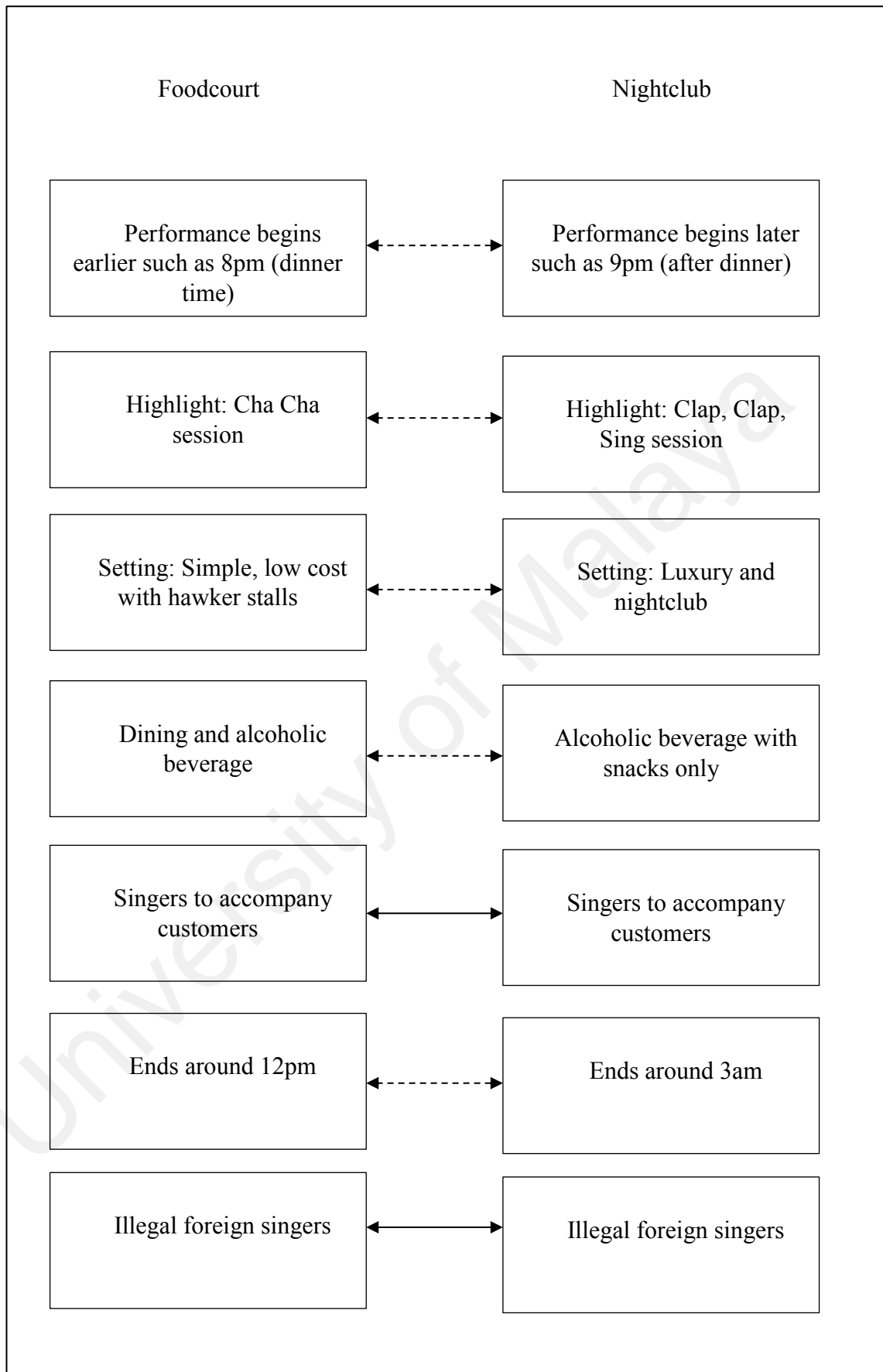


Figure 4.20: Comparison of *Diaohua Chang* in food court and nightclub Setting

The analysis and outcome gathered show that the nightclub performance resulted in many hidden functions of the *Diaohua Chang* (see Fig. 4.21).

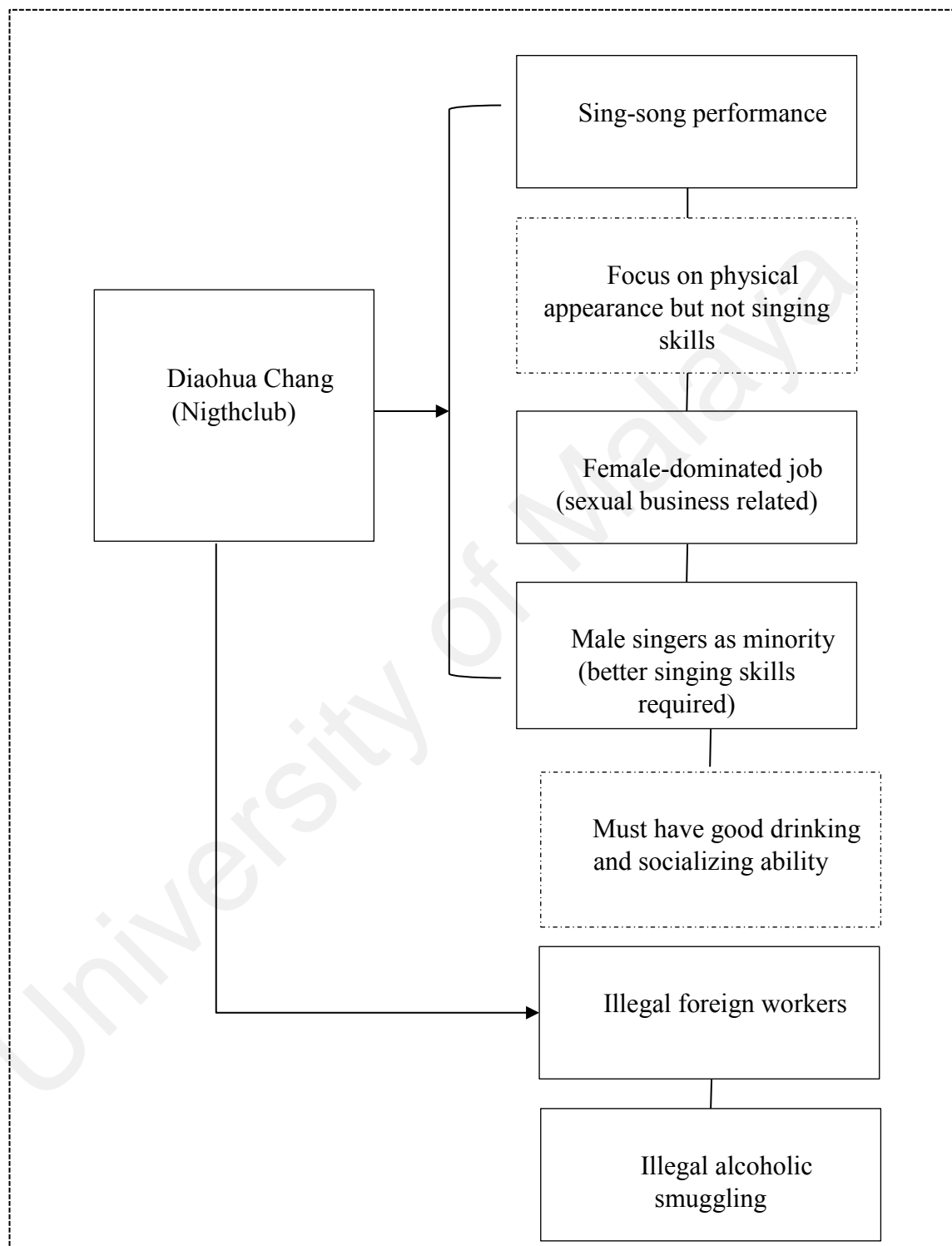


Figure 4.21: Summary of *Diaohua Chang* in a nightclub setting

Once it is hosted at a nightclub, many illegal conduct such as alcohol smuggling, illegal sexual business and foreign workers were involved. Indeed, although the performances may entertain the audience, however, there are many hidden issues behind the activities of *Diaohua Chang*.

Diaohua Chang is obvious in its gender-stereotyped nature and it reflects a close relation to prostitution. During the study, although no singers would admit to the author that they have other types of ‘service’, however, it is clear that the ‘extra’ illegal work is hidden and embedded in the community.

The findings from virtual fieldwork and the author’s observation showed that the *Diaohua Chang* singers were generalized as:

- a) Singers with poor dancing skills
- b) Singers with poor singing skills
- c) Public Relation Officer
- d) Prostitute
- e) Nightclub girls accompany men to drink and chat
- f) Singers for old men

Although the majority of the public views depict this as a low class performance linked with prostitution, however, there were singers who can sing too, but not many. Thus, this very much show that the singers are linked to what Jones (2001) label as selling songs and at the same time, in this *Diaohua Chang* context, selling their ‘body’ at the same time.

The author's own participation showed that for a male singer, a general biasness is obvious among the customers and audiences. Male audience will need to possess better singing skills or even force to drink a lot to entertain the customers. As the audience or customers were dominated by male viewers, male singers are not the preferred singer and hence, the income of male singer will be lower in terms of lesser gifts such as flower garlands from the customers.

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CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Overview

This final chapter concludes the autoethnographic research on *Diaohua Chang* at these three selected pubs N1, N2 and N3 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from January, 2015 till now. The discussion covers four sub-headings - implication of research, limitation of research, suggestions for future research, and conclusion.

5.2 Summary of Findings

During the process of pre-fieldwork, it has determined the limited scholarly literature on *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia. Chin (2004) is the first scholarly written dissertation written about *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia, which focuses only on the food court. While other literatures closely related to *Diaohua Chang* are the *Ko-tai* in Malaysia by Tan (1985) and Chang (2014) as well as *Getai* in Singapore by Ho (2014).

Hence, this evidenced that it is crucial to have such investigation conducted due to limited study in this field. No doubt, that *Diaohua Chang* is shed with negative images in the country, where it is a place for the man to entertain themselves by watching the pretty women on stage singing and by socializing with them. However, this singing and performing scene should be looked deeply at the impact of the music and culture in the Chinese community, Malaysia. It is an indispensable research and worthy of records.

This research is based on an autoethnography approach where the researcher participates actively with his experience. In this study, the author analysed data gathered from the musical performance, the lived experience of the singer and customers, and what is the focus of the attention at the field visited and by looking at the situation in an emic perspective. This autoethnographic study involved the observation participation, interview session, virtual fieldwork and internet searching, which concludes the results in this research.

The outcome of the study was analysed and discussed in Chapter 4 and the present chapter summarizes the findings as:

- a) *Diaohua Chang* is a Music Business that prioritizes attractive female singers
- b) Singing skills is not the key criteria, but physical attractiveness is
- c) The layout of *Diaohua Chang* in a nightclub setting was identified
- d) The singers' income generation based largely on the act of *diaohua*
- e) Songs selection is sometimes not of priority when compared to the physical attractiveness of a female singer
- f) Customers' songs preference is important in the act of *diaohua*
- g) The function of a male singer at *Diaohua Chang* differs to the female singer
- h) *Diaohua Chang* in the form of a nightclub has hidden illegal trades such as:
 - a. Alcohol smuggling
 - b. Illegal foreign worker
 - c. Illegal sexual business

The autoethnography method is positively suitable and sufficient for the researcher to collect data from the field. The author was able to actively participated and observed as the insider by being a host and singer at the *Diaohua Chang*. Furthermore, author's singing skills enabled him to successfully entered the community and being part of them as a family and engaged in a mutual relationship with the insiders. However, it is noted that it was not an easy task for the author to collect data at times as it may be awkward to ask questions while the other singers are busy working at the nightclub. However, the fact that author is a male singer formed less competition among the female singers and was

still able to access and communicate with most of the community working at *Diaohua* nightclubs.

In this study, the first research objective “to explore the music-making processes of *Diaohua Chang* as a form of a music business in a nightclub setting” was met as Chapter 4 revealed how the business was conducted. The findings show the organization layout of the business and the importance of each role played at the *Diaohua Chang* business. The outcome also reveals differences between the nightclub version and the food court setting.

The second research objective “to investigate the functions of *Diaohua Chang* as a musical culture based on an auto-ethnographical perspective” was also met as the author was able to penetrate to the field as an insider and provided an emic account of the study. The findings show that the research subject very much resembled to the *genü* and *getting* (sing-song girls and song halls) of the 1930s and 1940s old Shanghai pub lives. In a way, *Diaohua Chang* brought back the tradition of the *genü* and *getting*. However, the act of *Diaohua* was not present in the past and the gifts given by customers form the main income of the singers.

This profit orientated music business considered this group as the highest consumption group compared to the other age categories. Their main aim is to sell as many items as possible for the *Diaohua Chang* singers from RM 10 for a red flower garland to RM 100,000 for a Regal Gown. The live experience of how the performers interacted with the elderly audience in the music making has successfully luring them to buy expensive gowns for them when singing their favourite songs. The researcher had proved that from his performance as well as from the interviews with the elderly audience. Their answer is very simple; they are willing to do so is because they are happy to listen to the song. It reminds them of their nostalgia and sweet memories. Therefore, this study also revealed

the repertoire performed and preferred by the audiences and singers which indirectly contributed to the hanging flower sales for the singers. Chinese Golden Oldies have been verified to be the most favourite choice at the *Diaohua Chang*, as well as other Mandarin popular songs in the 80s, 90s, and 2000s. Moreover, to get the attention of the elderly audience (the highest consumption category), the 60's and 70's genres are more often to be sung. Due to the performers are mostly from Mainland China, most of the songs are in Mandarin.

The findings also show that although the *Diaohua Chang* is a music performance, however, the singing technique of the singers are not important. As in the tradition of *genü* the physical appearance and gender of the singer being female is the main concern. It is rather confusing to state that singing ability is not the main concern for a singer to be recruited at *Diaohua Chang*. If so, what does the audience experiencing? This entertainment pub is primarily for the man to relax and enjoy after a hard working day. It is a norm to associate man with woman, where this place is structurally built for leisure and enjoyment dominated by male customers.

Singing skill is no longer a requirement as part of the entertainment. But appearance does the trick. Singing on the stage is merely a transition to the next level of socializing with their sponsors through chit chatting and drinking alcohols. Singing on the stage is for the *Diaohua Chang* singers to show-off their appearance in order to attract as many customers as possible. This is also the reason why they are dressed “beautifully” in their performance. The customers psychologically blended with the vision of the charming woman singing on the stage and continue to involve in the scene by buying flower garlands, crowns or even expensive gowns to present their favourite beauty. The popularity (人气, renqi) is more visible when a lot of customers keep aiming at the similar beauty at the same time. As mentioned earlier, this live experience hails the scene with

“when there is popularity, then only will have the feel of the atmosphere” (有人气就有气氛, you renqi jiu you qifen).

Therefore, this created many social problems where the other parts of the research findings answered research objective three: to discuss gender and social issues of *Diaohua Chang* based on an auto-ethnographical perspective of a male-singer. The last objective was successfully met where gender and social issues in this industry has been clearly noted from an emic perspective.

All the research fields are known to be the places flocked by male patrons where female singers are to accompany them in the scene. Some male patrons with a vulgar sense kept aiming for beautiful singers and asked for “extra service.” It is up to the singer to choose to have “extra service” or not. In terms of salary, comparatively female singers have a much higher salary than the male singers because mostly male patrons are willing to spend their money on the female singers than the male singers. Thus, the female singer has more opportunity to earn commission than the male singer.

Furthermore, it was gathered that the illegal alcohol smuggling and foreign worker without permit and license brought in social problems in *Diaohua Chang*. In some e-forum, it was gathered that the girls working at *Diaohua Chang* received derogatory labels and they were perceived more as nightclub girls closely related to sexual conduct than true singers. Thus, the reputation of *Diaohua Chang* is not a positive one, although on surface, it is like a sing-song performance.

In conclusion, this dissertation provides an autoethnographic documentation of the standard layout of a *Diaohua Chang* in a nightclub setting designed for customers’ comfort and a high-class taste where there is a stage for singing performance surrounded with sofas and private rooms fully air-conditioned in a luxurious setting. In contrast to

Chin's study (2015), food is not the main item in their menu. Primarily alcoholic drinks, with simple snacks and fruits to order.

This place dominated with male patrons where singers are mostly foreign females. Choices of the songs lie heavily upon customers' preferences or is not of priority at times as the singers' physical attractiveness is the main concern. As proved by the researcher, familiar songs with the right group of customers will have a higher flower sale. This is also known as the correct timing where both the singers and the customers agreed on the same songs to be performed. Thus, customers' preferences are the main aim of having a successful show in this field.

From an emic account, this study is significant in a sense that the author is the first scholar who gained access to the *Diaohua Chang* field as an insider. Figure 5.1 illustrates the summary of the findings based on the conceptual framework in Chapter 1.

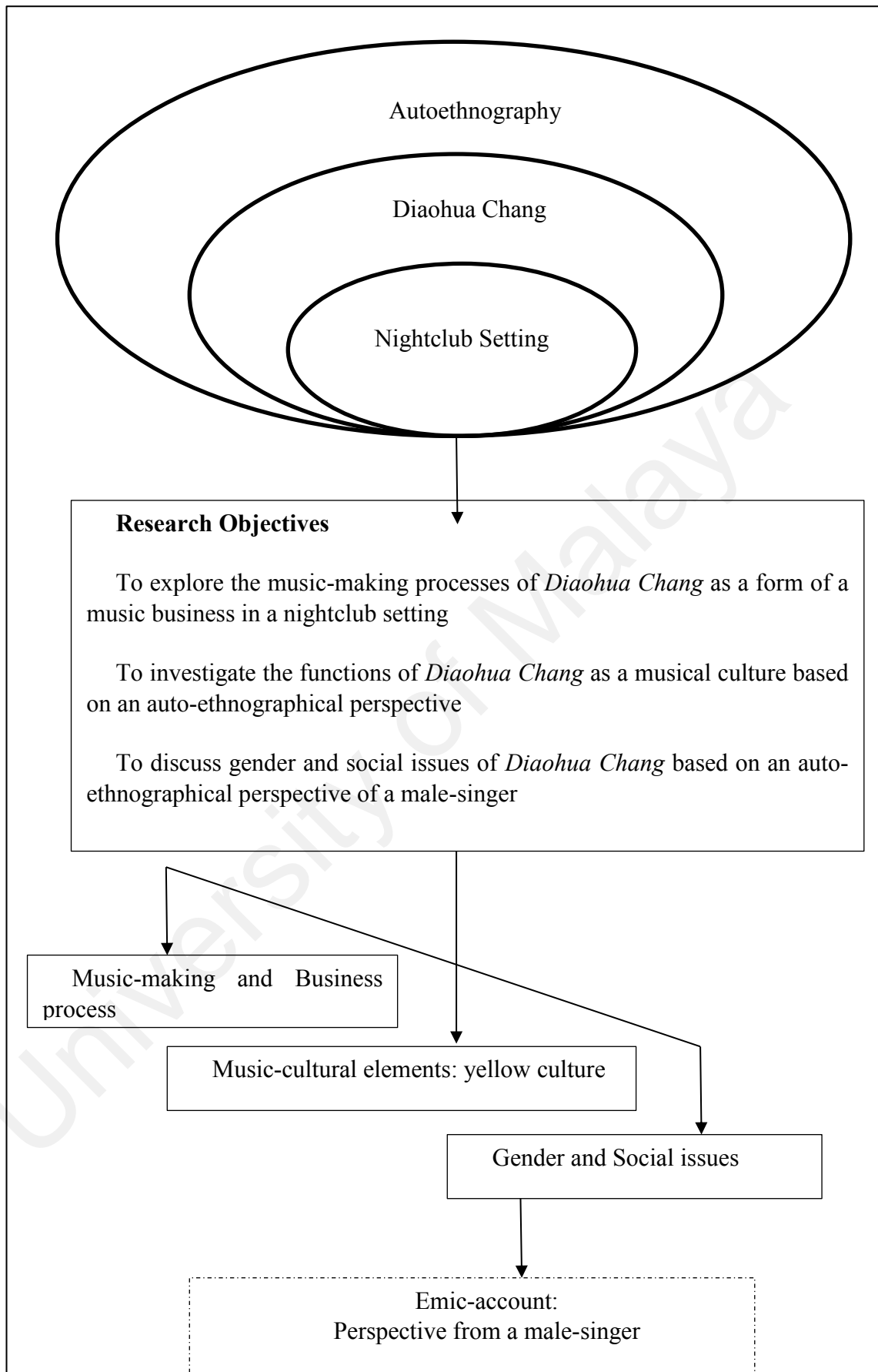


Figure 5.1: Summary of the Findings

5.3 Suggestion for Future Research

Diaohua Chang is not new in Malaysia. It is something common and available in Malaysia, especially in a high Chinese community density area and has its origin from *Getai* or *Ko-tai*. However, for this dissertation, the researcher only focuses on the three *Diaohua Chang* Pub in Kuala Lumpur. Thus, there is a sign to gain more information and reality about the *Diaohua Chang* in the various states in Malaysia. Moreover, there is a possibility that neighboring country such as Thailand and Singapore influence in the *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia. Furthermore, according to Tan (2016), there are another two types of *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia; The Tea Room *Diaolau Hua* and the High-Class *Diaohua Chang* which is yet to be explored and study.

5.4 Conclusion

The objectives of this research had been achieved. Autoethnography was completed within 38 months. Various issues were discussed include the music, sounds, performances and structure, live experience, culture, gender and social problems. It is hoped that this smaller scale has benefited in the research for future reference in *Diaohua Chang* studies

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APPENDIX A

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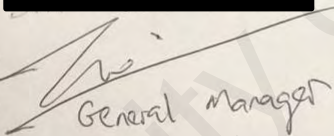
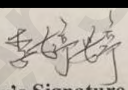
CONSENT FORM

To grant permission for the inclusion of interview statements and photos in Wang Lei's dissertation "An Autoethnography of Diaohua Chang," you are advised to sign this Consent Form.

1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge University of Malaya and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation and agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.
3. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
4. I hereby approve photographs of me and interview statements made by me to be published in the form of academic publication such as thesis, dissertation, journal article, book, for non-commercial use.

I have read the statements above, understand the same, and voluntarily sign this form.

Dated : 26 day 7 month 2018 year

Name :	[Redacted]	Passport/IC Number:	[Redacted]
Signature :		Date (<u>26/7/2018</u>)
Position :	<u>General Manager</u>		
Witness	[Redacted]	Passport/IC Number	[Redacted]
Signature :		Date (<u>26/7/2018</u>)
Name & Researcher's Signature		Date (<u>26/7/2018</u>)
	Wang Lei		

Consent Form