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### **Performance Characteristics of Contemporary A Cappella in China**

#### **Mr. Hongyu Zhang**

Ph.D Candidate , Arts Performance Communication, School of Liberal Arts, Shinawatra University

Email: [1365795@qq.com](mailto:1365795@qq.com)

#### **Dr. Nutthan Inkhong**

Asst. Dr. Nutthan Inkhong, School of Liberal Arts, Shinawatra University

Email: [nutthan.i@siu.ac.th](mailto:nutthan.i@siu.ac.th)

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#### **Abstract**

Contemporary A Cappella chorus, a gradually popular vocal singing style in the early 20th century, especially the addition of vocal percussion and imitation of musical instruments, was famous and made it quickly sung around the world. After being introduced to China, it quickly gained a group of supporters. After being influenced by the Chinese nationality, culture, region, cultural environment, social system, and other factors, the contemporary A Cappella presented a new style: a positive integration and change. Through the contemporary A Cappella in the West and China, both mutual reference and development trend of analysis, to find the fusion of Chinese elements of contemporary A Cappella performance characteristics, from the unique national features, creative style, performance elements three aspects, and scientific understanding of its value, for A Cappella and Chinese A Cappella singing practice, mutual reference, and development to provide theoretical support.

#### **Keywords**

Contemporary A Cappella chorus Chinese works Performance characteristics  
In the early 20th century, the contemporary A Cappella with the African American community and American universities as the starting point, a new attempt to add ventriloquism imitation instruments developed a unique contemporary A Cappella style, on this basis, the western for contemporary a cappella classification from the type and characteristics, also expand the scope of

its performance and training. Training in contemporary A Cappella singing can help singers develop vocal skills while training in performing styles, such as the classical academy, contemporary pop school, traditional jazz, jazz improvisation, and rock and roll. The training of these works may also focus on the style of Gospel, corner school, barbershop choir, and local music school. This study will use the term "a cappella" to indicate contemporary a cappella, sometimes referred to as popular a cappella. Such singing teams reproduce pop music by imitating the band's sound. Guitars, bass guitars, keyboards, and even drums can also be expressed through vocals. This "vocal band" performance form brings a unique sense of innovation to the song.

According to the analysis results of the last problem, we understand the differences in the performance of Chinese and Western works. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, we explore the performance characteristics of contemporary A Cappella works and the relationship between ethnic, cultural, regional, social, and other factors. Through the performance of the excellent orchestra, the audience can feel its distinctive characteristics, exchange feelings with the performers, understand the social life and ideological content reflected in the works, obtain aesthetic senses from it, and confirm why Chinese works do not show their charm well. The problem of the single theme and the performance characteristics are not distinct. The performance of Chinese works should establish a specific Chinese connotation embodied in the national cultural characteristics and social life status quo.

Performance is an essential medium for works and audiences. Its quality directly affects the musical performance and the audience's feelings, so it is necessary to explore its performance characteristics deeply. On the one hand, the cooperation of the vocal orchestra and the team's creativity can make the singers involved and benefit. On the other hand, I think that the behavior of singing is closely linked to the body, creating a deep connection between the singers and their life experiences.<sup>1</sup>

Due to most of the Chinese vocal orchestras of Chinese style works, performance characteristics are still in the exploration stage. Combined with the popularity of various Western works, the younger generation's characteristics of Chinese works did not get enough attention, leading to the performance of Chinese works style grasp is not an accurate problem. Given the question of how to better grasp the style of Chinese works, this paper puts forward the views of learning, integration, inheritance, and innovation and further develops Chinese contemporary A Cappella works. Through the above research, solve the following three problems: the problems that need to be solved in the development of contemporary a cappella chorus in China? What are the characteristics of Chinese contemporary A Cappella performance? How does the vocal orchestra grasp the

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<sup>1</sup> Harris M. Berger, "Phenomenological Approaches in the History of Ethnomusicology," Oxford Handbooks Online, December 2015, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935321.013.30.

performance characteristics of the Chinese-style works in its performance?

## **1. Contemporary development path of a cappella chorus in China and the West**

### **1.1 Current status of the West**

The United States was the first country to have this form and use it as a mature one. A new form of a cappella chorus, the "Barbershop Quartet" (Barbershop Quartet), is an important symbol of the emergence of the contemporary A Cappella choir. The first "academic" contemporary a cappella chorus: Yale University "Collegiate A cappella" Whiffenpuffs " (1909), marked the establishment of a cappella choir from the secularization, market culture into the field of social education and cultural inheritance. Founded in 2011, the Pentatonix vocal Orchestra has gradually popularized the form of contemporary A Cappella performances around the world (Almeida, 2020; Alvis, 2020; Ban, 2020).

Dik Sharon (Deke Sharon), *A Cappella* (A Cappella) by Ben Spalding and Brody McDonald) divides the historical background into the history of the classic A capella (History of Classical A Cappella) and the history of A Cappella pop music (History of A Cappella as Popular Music), In detail, Voice singing gradually changes from simple expression and interpersonal communication to social functionalization and institutionalization, Melodies also move from single to complex, There was even a scene of singing in different languages, The content is also getting more affluent, The book mentions the influence of the cultural background on this form of performance in A Cappella, It also reflects the critical role of social and cultural factors, During the period of high development of the instrument, Because its small demand for resources continues to survive, And is liberated when social forms changes, Give the middle class time and disposable income to learn and enjoy music, The performance form was also released, There were male, female, and mixed mixes, The resurgence of a cappella chorus, A new style of hymn performance and secular music creation appeared. It was also moving towards a new era, and the United States played an essential role. The rise of Barbershop, Doo-wop, and college a cappella choruses made people pay more attention to integrating themselves into the collective consciousness in this form of performance. By the beginning of the twentieth century, The A cappella chorus singing pop music has reached new heights of enthusiasm, Whether it's college songs, barbershop, jazz, pop, rhythm & blues, or world music, A cappella has all had a place in the history of pop music, In the late 1800's, Barbershops emerge from both the white and black vocal traditions, Combine their singing style and their own acting style, This form of performance is also gradually coming back to campus, Also foreshadowing the boom of a cappella, In the 1980's, There are nearly 250 groups around this group, From 1990 to 2000, Nearly 300 more new groups were formed, By the mid-2000's, One has estimated that 1,200 groups were active on university campuses, Their style is influenced by factors such as mainstream music, secular

pop music, religion, and race, In the late 2000s and late 2010s, through film, Television competition shows became the focus of media attention, Hundreds of development and evolution, A cappella chorus has become popular music.

Joshua Samuel Duchan mentioned the problems with a cappella in a unique development environment. He mentioned that contemporary college students singing a cappella should be considered a new musical genre developed from the original American musical style and genre. Philip Ennis faced this problem in explaining the rise of American "rock" in the 1950s. To answer this question, he developed the concept of "music flow," a phrase used as a theoretical framework to generalize the various musical and social styles and movements that have contributed to the music he studied. "Music flow is a clear part of the social reality," he wrote, "consisting of several elements: the artistic system, the economic framework, and the social movement." Contemporary college students singing a cappella is produced in three musical genres. First is the "classical" stream of the chorus, especially the American college choir in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The second is the "old-fashioned tight harmony" stream, mainly including the barbershop singing and its nostalgia and amateur spirit. While generally regarded as part of white nostalgia, American barbershop colonies have clear and solid roots in the African-American vocal tradition. The third is the "pop" stream, including pop music that was developed in the 20th century, including fighting dance, but with an emphasis on rock, rock, pop, and hip-hop in the second half of the century. This reminds the development of China that the contemporary university choir, as the main force, should inject "music flow" thinking into the development. Still, his research only mentioned the construction of thinking, and the specific performance elements have not been deeply discussed.<sup>2</sup>

Western A Cappella development and formation come from the social phenomenon, and mass culture is the collision of various cultures. Pop music has played an important role, is close to the public art performance form, aesthetic concept between individuals, and sharing between local, regional, and national level groups. Different degrees of power and prestige affect these ideas' acceptance, understanding, and implementation. Therefore, this paper first examines the emergence and development of history to explore the source of its cultural characteristics and social motivation and to provide a reference for the development of this form of performance in China.

## 1.2 Chinese Development Status

For China, the contemporary A Cappella was "imported" in late development; its performance style appears different from the traditional chorus. Into the 19th century, many singing contemporary A Cappella vocal orchestras active on the stage got the public attention. Still, due to the singing level, theoretical research,

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<sup>2</sup> Duchan, J.S.(2007).Powerful voices: Performance and interaction in contemporary collegiate a cappella (Order No.3276145).Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.(304851486).

and audience cognitive factors, such a traditional chorus is known by the public. As China pays more and more attention to the innovation of folk music and pop music, more and more practitioners are applying for Chinese-style works in A cappella performances, such as A Cappella works adapted from the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and *The Taking of Tiger Mountain*, which are refreshing for the audience. By studying the performance characteristics, this paper summarizes the unique or special features of Chinese contemporary A cappella music works and explores the style with Chinese regional cultural characteristics. Contemporary A Cappella performing art is a visual and auditory art directly by the vocal orchestra. This paper explores the characteristics of Chinese contemporary A Cappella songs under the musical influence of nationality, region, culture, and politics. This research aims to help understand the characteristics of contemporary Chinese unaccompanied chorus works and provide helpful information for practitioners.

Chinese researchers have become deeply interested in the "sinicization" of contemporary a cappella chorus. Some contemporary Chinese folk songs have been adapted into A Cappella songs, such as "Everything Is Born" and "Jasmine Flower." The unique singing forms and performance styles have injected new power into Chinese folk songs. The use of many disconnected intervals and timbre in the adapted songs is very different from the traditional A Cappella chorus. The strong sense of auditory impact does not bring us the importance of disharmonious listening. Still, it immerses the audience in a brand-new artistic appreciation experience for the Chinese audience. This can also fully show the artistic and aesthetic performance but the lack of concrete embodiment in some aspects of the discussion. Due to the homology of cognitive differences, not Chinese traditional a cappella, from the West in the process of its long development, a variety of music styles and A Cappella fusion produced various genres. Creative, performance and national characteristics have a precise classification, which China needs to learn in this respect.

Contemporary a cappella in China localization, Taiwan's first A Cappella professional orchestra, mysterious out of control, has a breakthrough traditional singing concept, drama, dance, walk, design, clothing, sound, pure vocal singing in a unique style, orchestra show style, both Taiwan indigenous music elements, but also different degrees by the old Shanghai, Japan, the United States, and many other cultures. Hong Kong and Macao received the influence of Portugal and Britain, the earliest start of contemporary a cappella chorus in China. Also, they played an essential role in its promotion in China. With the reform and opening up of the Chinese mainland, many advanced ideas and ideas began to pour into China. People first came to pop music in music, and through vocal music competitions and youth culture, they let everyone know about this particular form of performance. A cappella in China localization process broadly illustrates the development of music status and close ties between the development of politics, economy, education, and culture, but the considerable influence, integration of the global new forms of China, the collision of culture and concept, content and formal conflict, also into the

researchers' field of vision. Zhang Yizhen said in the article that the Chinese mainland's A Cappella career started late. Many aspects are not mature development and even have a particular Sasaki shape. From the current situation, the influence of the Chinese mainland orchestra is not contributing to A Cappella career. It shows that this awkward thinking exists in a large proportion of the audience. Therefore, today A Cappella in China has not made significant progress. It can not be close to the audience, not with local culture fusion burst out new vitality.

Therefore, the development of the Chinese contemporary A Cappella chorus should pay attention to the following points: first, to identify the differences in the performance style of Chinese and Western contemporary unaccompanied chorus songs, and second, to explore the performance characteristics of Chinese national culture, social culture, political culture, and to explore how to be better accepted by the public through the stage performance, to promote the charm of traditional Chinese music, and to create and perform Chinese works. The use of "A Cappella" to interpret traditional Chinese folk songs is itself a new integration of Chinese and western music culture, an innovative attempt in the form of expression and inheritance of traditional Chinese music, a new form to enrich and activate Chinese social music and cultural activities, and a new exploration in the field of Chinese contemporary a cappella research.

## **2. Characteristics of Chinese contemporary a cappella works**

### **2.1 Creation style of Chinese music works**

Isabella's writing style is mainly divided into five categories: blues, jazz, R & B, reggae, and soul, while the Chinese a cappella chorus is based mainly on folk songs and opera adaptations. Early Chinese works, primarily based on the above western music style, added a few Chinese elements to complete the creation. Like the old Shanghai-style songs "night incense" and Cantonese song "Clouds chasing the moon" use the blues style creation characteristics with a strong sense of rhythm, people can not help but dance up; Hokkien "hope spring breeze" is a soul-style of A Cappella works. The adaptation is not limited to popular songs. Songs with the most Chinese elements, such as Chinese Opera works "Zhaojun Out" and Kunqu Opera "1699 Peach Blossom Fan," are also adapted from contemporary A Cappella forms. China has a vast territory, and the local folk songs are also unique, such as the Mongolian folk song "Pastoral Song," singing about the happy life of the grassland, the chorus work "Four Seasons" adapted by Yongrubu, and the "Colorful Clouds Chasing the Moon- -Looking forward to the Return," which are given the feeling of missing, have also tried the vocal interpretation. To sum up, A Cappella's creative style mainly focuses on the field of pop music, while the Chinese a cappella chorus is dedicated to exploring the national style elements.

China is a multi-ethnic country composed of 56 ethnic groups. Different regions have different landforms, historical traditions, and ethnic customs with their

characteristics, so the music styles are also very different. Among them, southwest China's music characteristics are very distinct. The region is West of China wushan, qinling, south, east transverse mountain, boundless mountain, north of the mountain, the area of music, whether in its melody and tone, structure and harmony, rhythm and speed, polyphony and accessories and playing, singing and timbre have its characteristics. Creators will be the region minority voice method or singing form in their works, the region of minority Chinese ethnic singing method, but unique, and has a special singing, such as the Mongolian long, wheat, Tibetan daily language "arasso," Tibetan Buddhism in the six words "machine" spray machine moo, etc., these users in the contemporary A Cappella, can let a person as if in the magical earth.

## **2.2 Classification of Chinese-style chorus works**

### **2.2.1 Original ecological folk song chorus.**

This music style from the masses of life production practice, through the form of oral singing, the Chinese minority working people can be without any creation and harmony based on harmony, directly humming two or more parts, entirely from instinct, for a modern creative environment, is an incredible feat. This way of oral singing is also listed as an essential part of the "oral intangible cultural heritage" in China. And formed simultaneous singing, support singing, round singing, multi-part singing, and other forms. Often divided into high and low two acoustic parts or more than two acoustic parts, the sound part is often a four, five-octave interval relationship, constituting a natural support sound polyphonic relationship. For example, the recent Guizhou Dong big songs and Guangxi Zhuang big songs performed in the mainstream media are all accompanied by five Musical Instruments, which can be said to be the original ecological A Cappella works in China. However, although they are well preserved, they are insufficient in innovation, and few young people are willing to participate.

### **2.2.2 Opera and music compilation.**

Chinese Opera has a long history, the first from the imitation of songs and dances of labor, with distinct national characteristics, RongQu card, programming, rap, singing, sex, mass, regional integration, one of the more famous opera types: Peking opera, huangmei opera, Hunan flower drum opera, kunqu opera, etc., in harmony with traditional five harmony technique, at the same time, based on national style into modern harmony technique, appropriate to join the local dialect and opera lyrics, make chorus and Opera bring out the best in each other, promote each other. The contemporary Peking Opera, The Taking of Tiger Mountain, is the most representative, adapted from the A Cappella chorus. The whole music imitates the Peking Opera instrument, which is refreshing. The imitation of humming gongs and drums without lyrics makes people feel the charm of Peking Opera personally, which is the ultimate embodiment of vocal expression.

### **2.2.3 Creation of folk songs.**

Ethnic songs, folk songs, and folk music from all over China are essential sources of inspiration for the creators of Chinese contemporary a cappella works, such as Hakka folk songs, which retain the unique Hakka dialect and make the Hakka people far away to feel the charm of their hometown music. This is a kind of innovation and contribution of Chinese composers to the world chorus music art, and also one of the essential attempts of Chinese chorus music creation on the road of nationalization.

### **2.2.4 Compilation and creation of popular music.**

According to the contemporary popular (popular) music elements and chorus works is one of the development trends of the current world chorus music, popular (popular) music has a distinct flavor, and the popular hip-hop rap combined with jay's pop songs "compendium of Materia Medica" fragments and adapted into my new clothes, a fusion of rap, Peking Opera, pop melody, and many other elements, vocal strike, sometimes imitate jazz drum, sometimes imitate Peking Opera drums, some elements together, did not make the audience messy feelings, but every change is a surprise.

## **2.3 The Ethnic characteristics of Chinese works**

### **2.3.1 Ethnic characteristics of the musical material**

Many Chinese A Cappella songs use local folk songs or operas as creative materials. This excellent local folk song or opera music has experienced the changes and precipitation of The Times. It has been deeply integrated into people's lives, making people feel cordial after appreciation. Example: Jasmine Flower, the Chinese folk song that is more familiar around the world, can still leave the essence of the work after changing many versions." Jasmine Flower" is euphemistic, smooth, and delicate; by praising the jasmine flower, it implicitly shows the simple and soft feelings between men and women. Here, for the version of "MO LI HUA" adapted by Philip Lawson, the author uses a four-paragraph creation, with the introduction, two narrations, and the ending, like a wisp of the artistic conception of fragrance fading away, guiding the audience to feel the charm of Chinese folk songs in the atmosphere of the song. Because this kind of work is too familiar with the melody, it is difficult to surpass the natural feeling brought by the theme no matter what art form, which is a typical embodiment of nationality.

### **2.3.2 Ethnic characteristics of music tone type**

The Chinese national tone is a unique Chinese music sound system, produced in accordance with the law of five degrees, with twelve semitones, Also known as the Chinese adjustment formula, Including five tone type, six tone type,



seven tone type, and other forms, Among them, the five-tone pattern based on the pure five-degree relationship is one of the most commonly used tone patterns in ancient Chinese and local folk music, Especially in the creation of the multi-part choral music of the Chinese chorus, The composer paid particular attention to the flexible use of pentatonic, Although the rest of the world uses pentatonic, However, there are different degrees of differences in the composition and specific usage of the adjustment formula, China is formed on the basis of "palace, commerce, horn, character and feather", Pentatonic scales are characterized by the absence of minor second and triple sound, Make the sound simple, cooperative, Paribas is generally in a secondary or subordinate position.<sup>3</sup>

### **2.3.3 National characteristics of musical and language structure**

Starting and turning together is a vital language structure in Chinese music. Although this writing technique is more common in the West, there are aesthetic differences between China and the West. However, due to the cultural and aesthetic differences between the East and the West, Western music's initiation, integration, and development technique is often a continuous repetition of the same or different motives. However, the structure of the transition to the integration of music in Chinese folk music comes from the rhythm of ancient Chinese poetry, which emphasizes the connection and development between the horizontal melody lines of music, which is reflected in the four-sentence body structure in music. This creative technique is widely used in A Cappella works adapted from Chinese folk songs.

### **2.4 Characteristics of Chinese choral works and vocal harmony**

As an essential color presentation in a contemporary A Cappella chorus, harmony requires the cooperation of many people in the orchestra. The longitudinal sound of peace and chord are connected successively to form the musical image of contemporary A Cappella chorus works. Under the continuous development of choral art, harmony plays a more prominent role. In a vocal orchestra, the first part is generally arranged as the lead singer, and the vocal area of the melody is higher. In contrast, the second and third parts are the accompanying singers in the lower vocal area. The tension reflected by each part changes due to the pitch. Contemporary A Cappella focuses on musical acoustics, so A Cappella work is like an instrumental ensemble. For example, in the adapted A Cappella song "Night fragrance," the voices are imitated at the same distance between the left and right sections. The standard sound intervals are three degrees, four degrees, five degrees, and six degrees. In recent years, a cappella chorus and harmony, usually in a fixed position, make the sound layered. While the Chinese a cappella choir

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<sup>3</sup> Li Yuan.(2015).The national characteristics of Chinese chorus works creation and singing style analysis (a master's degree thesis, hunan normal university).

mainly uses three-degree overlapping chords. In contrast, three-degree overlapping chords are very suitable for five-tone works. For example, "Pastoral" uses a five-tone style, using a large number of three-degree overlapping function harmony, which is the characteristic of Chinese works and harmony arrangement based on the silent tone style.

### **3. Focus of the performance elements**

#### **3.1 Ethnic dance elements**

Western contemporary a cappella chorus pays attention to the diversity of the stage. In the performance, many dances, plots, funny, and other body language will be added. The band's booth on the location is not fixed, making full use of every position on the stage to achieve the visual impact. In some African folk song performances, the dance with national characteristics will be added, neat and casual, pursuing the rhythm of the action and adding the momentum rhythm, with all parts of the body to make a sound. It is reported that most Chinese vocal orchestras will also design dance movements in the performance. It isn't easy to achieve the perfect coordination of dance performance and sound like the Western or African orchestras. This is due to the national nature, which is not allowed to integrate into their performance. The Chinese vocal orchestra should start with more use of its folk-dance movements, such as integrating traditional Tibetan, Mongolian, Korean, Dai, and other traditional dances. To achieve performance excellence, contemporary A Cappella orchestras must find the right direction and pay for hard training.

#### **3.2 Ethnic clothing**

There are no restrictions on the performance venues of contemporary a cappella, so the help of the stage design for the performance is not always present. For example, the concert hall's simple lighting and stage design will not be the primary dependence on the performance effect. In this case, the performance will become single and erase the personality display of the A Cappella performance. These can be completed through costumes. All 56 ethnic groups in China have unique costumes, with a wide range of choices in the performance. Choosing the appropriate ethnic outfits will add color to the performance and deepen the audience's visual experience.

#### **3.3 Stage performance**

Reasons for the diversification of current international and domestic chorus performances. International chorus competition variety, forms, only according to the style and performance form division without accompaniment and accompaniment church chorus, non-Christian chorus, chorus, jazz chorus, Gospel,

black spirit chorus, pop music chorus, folk chorus, folk chorus, etc., including the free choice of contestants country, language, cultural folk, it requires ensemble in the process of performance can fully reflect the folk game, folk tradition contestants folk characteristics of the folk life. Cultural traditions in China represent the character characteristics of various ethnic groups. The Han nationality is deeply influenced by Confucian culture, so the music is introverted, humble, simple, gentle, and flexible. Although the northwest music in Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang and the ethnic minority music in Guizhou and Yunnan provinces all have the tradition of singing and dancing, the styles also have noticeable differences in performance style and arrangement design that are naturally not the same. Even with most Han music, the minor tune is soft and graceful, the folk songs are high and straightforward, and the opera singing is far from the stylized performance, which should be considered in the stage performance design.

Contemporary stage performances of a cappella chorus should not only keep pace with The Times, nor blindly follow the fashion trend, and seek unity. It should not only have the symbol of national tradition and regional characteristics but also be widely combined and pay attention to the richness of the repertoire and the diversity of the performances.

#### **4. Creation direction and development suggestions of Chinese contemporary A Cappella works**

The national nature of art refers to "the use of the nation's unique art forms and artistic techniques to reflect the real life so that the literary and artistic works have the national style and the national style." Artworks with national characteristics are based on the national cultural and artistic tradition and aesthetic consciousness, using the traditional art form of creation, mainly showing the national people's life, thoughts and feelings, wishes, and artistic aesthetic taste.

For the development direction of Chinese contemporary A Cappella performance, attention should also be paid to how to correctly understand the relationship between "nationality" and "global." The formation of "national style" is not a simple imitation but a creative problem. Regarding the research in this field, we should have a deeper understanding of many aspects of Chinese contemporary A Cappella works, find out the issues and actively explore them to each human voice performance of the emotion, image, and style of in-depth exploration. Contemporary A Cappella performance design should follow the different stages of chorus training, different degrees, and distances, be familiar with the particularity of the singing ontology, the feasibility of performance, respect the diversity of culture, follow the aesthetic standards of performance design, dare to explore, to constantly improve the chorus stage performance design, arrangement ability, and performance level.

The contemporary form of A Cappella chorus can make the team members communicate more closely and produce an essential value in interpersonal

communication. This performance has developed into an art form that many pursue, enabling training and performance at many ages, especially for college students. Through team interaction, pride, and goal, further integrated innovation will be the development direction of contemporary A Cappella chorus in China.

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