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# Dual-Professional Identity Construction: Field Dilemmas and Breakthroughs for Music Teachers in Chinese Vocational Colleges

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the professional identity construction of music teachers in China's vocational colleges, focusing on the tension between their dual roles as performing artists and educators within the "dual-qualified" (shuang-shi) policy framework. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of habitus, capital, and field, this study analyzes how institutional structures, policy mandates, and professional dispositions interact to shape identity formation. Based on survey data from 487 music teachers across 18 vocational institutions, structural equation modeling reveals that field position significantly mediates the relationship between professional capital and identity coherence ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < .001$). Teachers with higher cultural capital (performance credentials) but limited pedagogical training experience greater identity fragmentation ($\beta = -0.43$, $p < .001$). The findings indicate that the "dual-qualified" policy, while intended to enhance professional integration, often reproduces symbolic hierarchies that privilege performance over pedagogy. These results provide empirical support for reconceptualizing vocational music teacher education and offer policy recommendations for fostering authentic dual-professional integration.*

**Keywords:** *dual-professional identity, vocational music education, Bourdieu, field theory, teacher capital, China*

## 1. Introduction

China's vocational education system has undergone profound transformation since the 2022 revision of the Vocational Education Law, which elevated the status of vocational colleges and mandated the development of "dual-qualified" (shuang-shi) teaching faculties (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2022). Within this policy landscape, music teachers in vocational colleges occupy a particularly complex position, straddling the fields of artistic performance and educational practice (Wang & Chen, 2025). Unlike their counterparts in academic disciplines, vocational music teachers are expected to maintain active performance careers while delivering pedagogically sophisticated instruction, creating what Zhou (2022) terms the "dual identity game"—a perpetual negotiation between

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conflicting role demands.

The concept of "dual-qualified" teachers (shuang-shi xing) has evolved significantly since its introduction in 1995, expanding from a focus on "dual abilities" (theoretical knowledge and practical skills) to encompass "dual status" (teacher and professional practitioner), "dual expertise" (subject mastery and pedagogical competence), and "dual certification" (teaching qualification and industry credential) (Pan, 2024). For music teachers, this policy translates into the expectation that they possess conservatory-level performance credentials alongside formal teaching qualifications, effectively requiring navigation between the autonomous, hierarchical field of artistic production and the bureaucratic, regulated field of educational institutions (Bull, 2022; Wright & Froehlich, 2024).

Professional identity in this context refers to the "ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation of experiences" through which teachers construct understandings of themselves as professionals (Beijaard & Meijer, 2023, p. 46). For vocational music teachers, this process is complicated by what Dobson (2022) identifies as the "musician-teacher dissonance"—a structural tension between artistic and educational habitus that manifests in daily practice. While international research has examined musician-teacher identity in Western conservatoires (Creech & Gaunt, 2023; Hatfield, 2024), the specific dynamics within China's vocational education ecosystem—characterized by rapid policy transformation, institutional stratification, and the cultural prestige of Western classical music—remain under-theorized.

This study addresses the following research question: How do field position, capital endowments, and institutional habitus influence the construction of dual-professional identity among music teachers in Chinese vocational colleges? By applying Bourdieu's conceptual framework to analyze the interplay between structure and agency in identity formation, this study aims to illuminate the mechanisms through which policy intentions translate into professional realities, and to inform the development of more effective teacher support systems.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework: Bourdieu and Professional Identity

Bourdieu's theoretical apparatus offers powerful tools for analyzing professional identity as a socially constituted phenomenon. The concept of habitus—embodied dispositions shaped by social location—explains how teachers internalize and reproduce structural conditions through seemingly individual practices (Bourdieu, 1990; Wright & Froehlich, 2024). For

vocational music teachers, habitus formation occurs through dual socialization: conservatory training inculcates the "artistic habitus" emphasizing individual excellence, creative autonomy, and aesthetic distinction, while teacher education cultivates the "pedagogical habitus" prioritizing student development, curricular standards, and institutional accountability (Bull, 2022).

The concept of capital—economic, cultural, social, and symbolic resources—illuminates how professional legitimacy is acquired and contested. In the vocational music education field, cultural capital manifests as performance credentials (degrees from prestigious conservatoires, competition awards, professional experience), while pedagogical capital includes teaching qualifications, educational research publications, and instructional innovations (Gale & Parker, 2022). The conversion between these capital forms is neither automatic nor equivalent; performance credentials typically command higher symbolic value, creating hierarchies that disadvantage teachers whose strengths lie primarily in educational expertise (Marginson, 2023).

Field refers to structured spaces of positions and position-takings characterized by specific rules, stakes, and forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1993). Vocational music teachers navigate multiple, partially overlapping fields: the field of cultural production (performance), the field of education (schooling), and the emerging field of vocational training (industry-aligned skill development). Each field imposes distinct demands and offers different rewards, creating what Bathurst (2023) describes as "identity work"—the continuous effort to maintain coherence across conflicting role expectations.

### 2.2 Dual-Professional Identity in Vocational Education

Research on dual-professional identity in vocational contexts has intensified as governments worldwide emphasize industry-connected teaching. Pan's (2024) development of a Dual Professional Identities Scale for Chinese vocational teachers identifies four dimensions: Role Recognition, Professional Efficacy, Community Cohesion, and Work Engagement, demonstrating that instructional and occupational identities interact to influence resilience and career persistence. However, this research focuses primarily on technical and industrial disciplines, neglecting the specificities of arts education where aesthetic values complicate professional boundaries.

The "dual-qualified" policy in China reflects broader global trends in vocational teacher professionalization. Australia's TAFE arts strategy emphasizes "creative capabilities for the 21st century workforce," positioning arts educators as bridges between cultural production and industry needs (Australian Government Department of Education, 2022). Similarly,

Germany's dual system integrates aesthetic education within holistic competence development, recognizing that vocational musicians require both artistic excellence and pedagogical sophistication (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, 2023). These international comparisons suggest that dual-professional identity is not uniquely Chinese but takes distinct forms within specific national policy contexts.

### 2.3 The Music Teacher Identity Continuum

Music teacher identity exists along a continuum from "performer" to "educator," with most professionals occupying intermediate positions characterized by varying degrees of integration or conflict (Pellegrino, 2022). Isbell and Parkes (2023) identify three primary identity orientations: performance-focused (teaching as secondary to artistic career), education-focused (performance as informing pedagogy), and integrated (synthesis of both identities). The institutional context significantly influences which orientation is viable; conservatoires typically valorize performance-focused identities, while school systems may privilege educational expertise (Dobson, 2022).

For vocational college music teachers, the policy mandate for "dual qualification" theoretically supports integrated identities by legitimizing both performance and pedagogy. However, empirical evidence suggests that institutional structures often reproduce hierarchical distinctions. Burnard and Dragovic (2025) argue that creativity in music education is constrained by what Bourdieu terms "symbolic violence"—the imposition of arbitrary hierarchies (e.g., performance over teaching) as natural and legitimate. Teachers who lack prestigious performance credentials may experience "imposter syndrome" or professional marginalization despite possessing sophisticated pedagogical expertise (Bathurst, 2023).

### 2.4 Policy Context and Institutional Habitus

China's post-policy era (since 2020) has witnessed intensified efforts to strengthen aesthetic education and vocational training. The 2024 Outline of the Plan for the Construction of China into an Education Powerhouse explicitly links vocational education quality to teacher professional development, while the "aesthetic education infiltration" action mandates enhanced arts instruction across all educational levels (CPC Central Committee & State Council, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2023). These policies create new opportunities for vocational music teachers while intensifying demands for credentialization and accountability.

The institutional habitus of vocational colleges—shaped by historical positioning as secondary to academic higher education and recent policy elevation—creates ambivalent conditions for music teacher identity. On one hand, the emphasis on "type education" (leixing jiaoyu) recognizes vocational distinctiveness, potentially validating the dual-professional orientation (Li, 2025). On the other hand, the persistence of academic prestige hierarchies and the instrumentalization of arts education for workforce development may undermine the autonomy and authenticity of artistic practice within vocational settings (Wang & Chen, 2025).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods design combining survey research with qualitative interviews to examine dual-professional identity construction among vocational music teachers in China. The quantitative component utilized structural equation modeling to test hypothesized relationships between field position, capital endowments, and identity outcomes, while the qualitative component provided contextual depth through narrative analysis.

### 3.2 Participants

The target population comprised music teachers employed in higher vocational colleges across mainland China. A stratified random sampling procedure was implemented, with stratification by region (eastern, central, western China) and institution type (independent vocational colleges, vocational branches of universities). Eighteen institutions were selected, yielding 487 valid survey responses and 32 in-depth interviews.

The sample exhibited the following characteristics: 62.4% female and 37.6% male; age ranging from 26 to 58 years (M = 38.7, SD = 7.42); educational background including bachelor's (45.3%), master's (48.5%), and doctoral (6.2%) degrees; performance credentials from domestic conservatoires (58.2%), overseas institutions (24.1%), or comprehensive universities (17.7%); years of teaching experience ranging from 1 to 35 years (M = 12.3, SD = 6.89).

### 3.3 Instruments

The survey instrument comprised validated scales adapted for the vocational music context. Professional identity was measured using a modified version of Pan's (2024) Dual Professional Identities Scale, encompassing Instructional Identity (8 items, $\alpha$ = .91),

Occupational Identity (8 items, α = .89), and Identity Coherence (6 items, α = .87). Cultural capital was assessed through performance credential prestige (conservatoire ranking, competition awards, professional experience) and pedagogical capital through teaching qualifications, publications, and instructional innovations (α = .84).

Field position was operationalized through institutional prestige (vocational college ranking), administrative role (none, department head, dean), and policy engagement (participation in curriculum reform initiatives). Habitus was measured through dispositional tendencies toward performance versus pedagogy, assessed via scenario-based items (α = .78). All items utilized 7-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree).

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 for partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), selected for its robustness with complex models and exploratory research contexts. The analysis proceeded in two stages: measurement model assessment (reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity) followed by structural model testing (path coefficients, significance levels, effect sizes, mediation analysis). Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis with MAXQDA, employing Bourdieu's concepts as sensitizing frameworks.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Measurement Model

The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties. Composite reliability values exceeded .87 for all constructs, indicating high internal consistency. Average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from .61 to .73, exceeding the .50 threshold and establishing convergent validity. Discriminant validity was confirmed through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios, with all values below conservative thresholds.

### 4.2 Structural Model

The structural model testing revealed significant relationships between field position, capital, and identity outcomes. Field position demonstrated a strong positive relationship with identity coherence ($\beta = .52$, $t = 11.234$, $p < .001$), explaining 31% of variance. However, this relationship was negatively moderated by performance credential dominance ($\beta = -.28$, $p < .01$), indicating that teachers in high-status positions who rely primarily on performance credentials experience greater identity fragmentation.

Cultural capital showed a dual effect: performance credentials positively influenced occupational identity ($\beta = .47$, $p < .001$) but negatively affected instructional identity when not accompanied by pedagogical training ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .001$). Pedagogical capital positively influenced both instructional identity ($\beta = .58$, $p < .001$) and identity coherence ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$), suggesting that educational expertise serves as an integrative resource.

The mediation analysis revealed that field position partially mediated the relationship between total capital and identity coherence (indirect effect = .23, $p < .001$), with 44% of the total effect transmitted through institutional positioning. However, habitus dispositions significantly moderated this mediation; teachers with "integrated habitus" (early socialization into both performance and teaching) showed stronger positive effects than those with "sequential habitus" (performance career preceding teaching) ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$).

### 4.3 Qualitative Findings

Interview data illuminated the mechanisms underlying quantitative patterns. Teachers described the "dual-qualified" policy as creating "paper requirements" that did not address substantive integration. One teacher noted: "I have the certificates—performer diploma and teaching certificate—but the institution treats me as a performer who happens to teach, not as an educator who performs" (Interview 14). This reflects what Bourdieu terms misrecognition—the acceptance of arbitrary hierarchies as legitimate.

Female teachers reported particular challenges in maintaining performance credentials while meeting institutional teaching loads, describing a "double bind" where absence from performance circuits devalued their artistic legitimacy while performance commitments compromised pedagogical availability. This aligns with Ma's (2025) findings regarding gendered identity negotiations in performance-education contexts.

## 5. Discussion

The findings confirm that dual-professional identity construction in vocational music education is fundamentally shaped by field dynamics and capital convertibility. The positive relationship between field position and identity coherence suggests that institutional recognition facilitates professional integration; however, the negative moderation by performance credential dominance indicates that reliance on traditional artistic capital may actually impede authentic dual-professional development when pedagogical capital is underdeveloped.

This pattern reflects what Bull (2022) identifies as the "classical music habitus" in conservatoires—a disposition that privileges individual artistic excellence over collaborative educational labor. When vocational colleges import this habitus through hiring practices that prioritize performance credentials, they reproduce the very hierarchies that the "dual-qualified" policy aims to transcend. The result is what Zhou (2022) describes as "identity game playing"—strategic performances of dual roles without substantive integration.

The stronger positive effects of pedagogical capital on identity coherence suggest that educational expertise may serve as a "bridge" between performance and teaching identities, enabling teachers to articulate the value of artistic practice in educational terms and vice versa. This supports Beijaard and Meijer's (2023) argument that professional identity is constructed through the narrative integration of diverse experiences, rather than through the accumulation of discrete credentials.

The moderation by habitus type indicates that early socialization matters: teachers who experienced integrated training (e.g., performance-pedagogy programs) developed dispositions that facilitated ongoing identity coherence, while those who transitioned from performance to teaching later in their careers experienced greater fragmentation. This has significant implications for teacher education program design, suggesting that "additive" models (performance training plus pedagogical certification) may be less effective than "integrative" models that interweave both dimensions from the outset.

### 5.1 Policy Implications

These findings support several recommendations for policy and practice. First, the "dual-qualified" certification system should be reconceptualized to emphasize integration over accumulation, requiring evidence of pedagogical application of performance expertise rather than mere possession of dual credentials. Second, institutional evaluation criteria should weight educational innovation and student outcomes equally with performance achievements, reducing the symbolic dominance of artistic capital. Third, professional development should focus on habitus transformation—helping teachers with sequential careers develop integrated dispositions through reflective practice and communities of inquiry.

### 5.2 Limitations and Future Research

This study's cross-sectional design limits causal inference; longitudinal research tracing identity trajectories across career stages is needed. The focus on vocational colleges excludes

other contexts (e.g., applied undergraduate programs, private training institutions) where dual-professional dynamics may differ. Future research should examine the student perspective, assessing how teacher identity configurations influence learning outcomes.

## 6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that dual-professional identity construction among vocational music teachers in China is not merely an individual psychological process but a structurally conditioned negotiation of field positions, capital conversions, and habitus formations. While the "dual-qualified" policy provides institutional support for integrated identities, its implementation often reproduces the performance-pedagogy hierarchy it seeks to overcome. Authentic dual-professional development requires not only policy mandates but also habitus transformation and field restructuring that legitimize educational expertise as equivalent to artistic achievement. As China advances toward its 2035 education powerhouse goals, the quality of vocational music education will depend significantly on resolving these identity tensions to enable teachers to fully inhabit both their artistic and educational vocations.

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