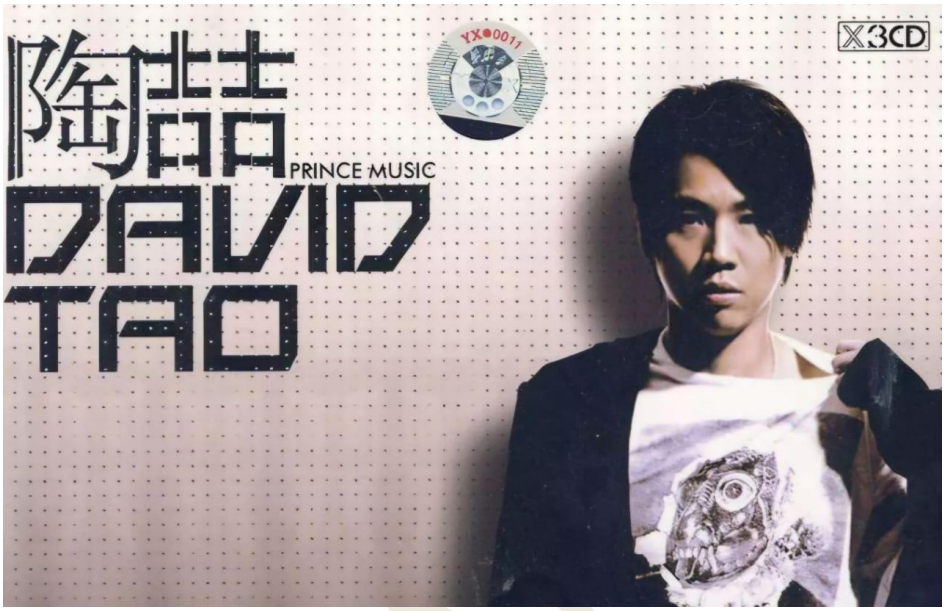
Biography of David Tao



Black Tangerine

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Chapter 1
A Childhood Between Two Cities: Born in Hong Kong, Raised in Taipei (1969–1984)



On 11 July 1969, David Tao was born in Hong Kong. His birth name was Tao Xuzhong, although he later became widely known as David Tao. His family represented a remarkable chapter in the history of Chinese popular culture. His father, Tao Dawei, was a household name in Taiwan as a singer, television host and actor. His mother, Wang Furong, was a celebrated qingyi performer in Peking opera, while his maternal grandfather, Wang Zhenzu, was the founder of Taiwan's Fu Hsing Chinese Opera School.

David Tao spent his childhood moving between Hong Kong and Taipei. In Taipei, he grew up in a household immersed in the performing arts. His father was then singing Western

popular songs in nightclubs, while his mother had retired from the Peking opera stage to become a full-time homemaker. Musicians frequently visited their home, and guitars, pianos and countless records formed his earliest musical memories.

Nevertheless, his parents did not deliberately prepare him to follow in their footsteps. As Tao later recalled, his father never forced him to study music, instead encouraging him to read widely and think independently. This relatively unrestricted family environment helped Tao develop the habit of forming his own judgements from an early age, a characteristic that would profoundly influence his later musical creations.

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Chapter 2
A Young Man in Los Angeles: From Psychology to Film (1984–1993)

At the age of fifteen, David Tao made the first major decision of his life: moving to Los Angeles, United States, to live and study. Having grown up in Taipei and Hong Kong, he suddenly found himself immersed in an unfamiliar English-speaking environment. The experience represented both a rupture with his earlier life and a form of liberation. In Los Angeles, he encountered American R&B, African-American gospel music, rock and jazz in a systematic way for the first time. These musical traditions would eventually become the central vocabulary of his artistic work.

At the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Tao majored in Film and minored in Psychology. Although this academic combination might have appeared unrelated to a conventional music career, it helped shape his later creative approach. His film studies taught him how to construct narratives and express emotions through vivid imagery, while psychology deepened his understanding of the complexities of human behaviour. The social observation and reflection that subsequently characterised his songs, together with his ability to intertwine personal emotions with broader themes, had their roots in his education at UCLA.

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During his years in the United States, Tao also worked briefly as a police officer. He later described this experience by observing that “once I took off my gun, I was really just an ordinary person.” This identification with ordinary people would remain a recurring theme throughout his creative career.

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Chapter 3
Seven Years Behind the Scenes: From Wang Zhiping to Acclaimed Producer (1993–1997)

In 1993, an unexpected encounter changed the direction of David Tao's life. While in the United States, he met the renowned music producer Wang Zhiping, an experience that led him to return to Taiwan and enter the Mandarin popular music industry.

During his first few years back in Taiwan, Tao worked primarily behind the scenes as a music producer. He composed and produced songs for leading performers including Jeff Chang, Sarah Chen, Charlie Yeung, Eric Suen, L.A. BOYS, Alex To and A-Mei. In 1995, his production work on Sarah Chen's album Shuhua in Bloom became one of the early highlights of his career. These years behind the scenes gave him two invaluable advantages: a deep understanding of how the Mandarin popular music industry operated and practical experience collaborating with established performers. Nevertheless, he continued waiting for an opportunity to present his own music to the public.

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Chapter 4
1997: An Album That Transformed Mandarin Popular Music

In 1997, twenty-eight-year-old David Tao released his self-titled debut album, David Tao.

The album marked a watershed in the history of Mandarin popular music. Tao introduced American-style R&B into the Mandarin music scene in a comprehensive and uncompromising form, incorporating rhythmic patterns rooted in African-American gospel traditions, improvised vocal runs and complex harmonic arrangements. Songs such as Airport at 10:30, Love Is Simple, Beach and Spring Breeze fundamentally transformed the listening expectations of Mandarin pop audiences through Tao's distinctive vocal techniques and approach to arrangement.

The signature harmonies and vocal runs in Airport at 10:30 would be repeatedly celebrated by later generations of fans, becoming a textbook example of Mandarin R&B. His reinterpretation of the traditional Taiwanese Hokkien song Spring Breeze employed the musical language of R&B to reinvent a familiar local melody, demonstrating the remarkable possibilities created when Western musical forms interact with indigenous cultural traditions.

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In 1998, Tao received five nominations at the 9th Golden Melody Awards for the album: Best New Artist, Best Male Mandarin Singer, Best Composer, Best Album Producer and Best Pop Vocal Album. He ultimately won Best New Artist and Best Album Producer. For a debut artist to win a production award at the same ceremony was exceptionally rare in the history of the Golden Melody Awards.

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Chapter 5
Black Tangerine: From Romantic Balladeer to Social Observer (1999–2005)

In 1999, David Tao released his second album, I'm OK. With this recording, he began moving beyond the conventional boundaries of R&B, incorporating elements of traditional Chinese music, rock and electronic sounds. The album sold more than 500,000 copies, while songs such as Small Town Girl and Find Myself became enduring favourites. The album also earned him the Best Album Producer award at the 11th Golden Melody Awards.

The album that truly transformed Tao from an R&B singer into a musician concerned with broader social questions, however, was Black Tangerine, released in 2002. Its title track employed the heavy textures of electronic rock to explore the pain of lost love and the desolation of society. Another song, Dear God, was written in response to the September 11 attacks in 2001, offering both an opposition to terrorism and a reflection on the tragedy. Tao was no longer simply a singer of romantic ballads. He began addressing social issues through music, embedding pointed criticism within the rhythmic language of R&B.

His 2005 album The Great Leap carried this social awareness to a new level. The song Susan Says skilfully combined traditional Chinese melodic forms with Western R&B, while

The Art of War placed Western and traditional Chinese instruments alongside one another. The album won Best Mandarin Album at the 17th Golden Melody Awards.

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Chapter 6
At the Peak and Under Scrutiny: Golden Melody Recognition and the Controversy Surrounding Beautiful (2006–2013)

In 2006, David Tao released Beautiful. One of its songs, Marry Me Today, performed as a duet with Jolin Tsai, became one of the most widely recognised wedding songs in Mandarin popular music and won Song of the Year at the 18th Golden Melody Awards. Nevertheless, the album also attracted sharp criticism from professional music reviewers. Some argued that everything from its cover design to its musical content displayed “repetition and a complete lack of originality,” dismissing it as “another ordinary record produced on the assembly line of the music industry.” This tension between commercial success and critical evaluation reflected Tao's distinctive position within Mandarin popular music: he was both a mainstream idol and an artist subjected to serious critical scrutiny.

His 2009 album Opus 69 was a tribute to rock music. Its title provoked controversy among conservative groups, but this did not diminish its artistic significance. In 2010, Tao won Best Male Mandarin Singer at the 21st Golden Melody Awards for the album, receiving the prestigious title of Golden Melody Best Male Singer for the first time in his thirteen-year performing career.

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Chapter 7
An Ordinary Man's Rhapsody: From Music to Cinema (2013–2025)

In 2013, David Tao released Hello Goodbye, which earned him the awards for Best Producer of the Year and Best Male Singer of the Year at the Global Chinese Golden Chart Awards. Following this release, however, his musical output slowed considerably.

In an interview in 2013, Tao made a widely quoted statement: “I am not a full-time entertainer, and I do not want to be a singer for my entire life. I hope to start a family, establish a career, nurture new talent and make films. Only five per cent of me is an entertainer. The other ninety-five per cent is exactly like everyone else.” He openly acknowledged that he had “almost no friends in the entertainment industry,” explaining that his closest friends worked in real estate, restaurants and footwear retail. He named one of his concert productions An Ordinary Man's Rhapsody and invited one hundred newlywed couples and eight hundred grassroots workers, including people with disabilities, construction workers and sanitation workers, to attend. This conscious identification with ordinary people was closely connected to his earlier experience as a police officer, when he had realised that without his service weapon, he was simply another ordinary person.

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Having majored in Film at UCLA, Tao never abandoned his ambition to become a filmmaker. In an interview, he declared unequivocally: “I must make a film. Otherwise, it will become the greatest regret of my life.”

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Chapter 8
A Return: Joining Universal Music and STUPID POP SONGS (2025–Present)

In July 2025, David Tao and Universal Music Greater China announced a global strategic partnership, bringing him under the Universal Music label. The first project under this collaboration was his eighth studio album, STUPID POP SONGS, featuring fifteen tracks and marking his return with a new studio album after a twelve-year interval. In the album, Tao sought to “break through established frameworks and challenge what is possible,” incorporating elements such as “distorted electric guitars and screaming vocals.” Timothy Xu, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Universal Music Greater China, commented: “David Tao's works have inspired generations of listeners through their profound emotional depth and artistic courage.”

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Chapter 9
Concluding Reflections: Five Per Cent Entertainer, Ninety-Five Per Cent Ordinary Person

One clear theme has run throughout David Tao's life: the search for balance between two identities.

He is the son of Tao Dawei and Wang Furong, yet he never simply inherited his parents' performing careers. Instead, he travelled to the United States, studied film and psychology, and worked as a police officer. He is widely regarded as the godfather of Mandarin R&B, yet he repeatedly emphasises that “only five per cent” of his identity belongs to the entertainment industry. He is a Golden Melody Award-winning singer, yet he invited construction and sanitation workers to attend his concert, An Ordinary Man's Rhapsody.

From Hong Kong to Taipei, from Taipei to Los Angeles, and from Los Angeles back to Taiwan, David Tao has devoted nearly forty years of his musical career to exploring what it means to remain true to himself. He is not a flawless idol. His career has included controversies, criticism and accusations that his music has declined rather than progressed. Yet these imperfections have helped preserve a sense of authenticity in his artistic work. His R&B was not simply copied from a textbook; it emerged from the experiences of his own life.

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