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## **The performance of identity in Chinese popular music**

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# The Performance of Identity in Chinese Popular Music

Proefschrift

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de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,  
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volgens besluit van het College van Promoties  
te verdediging op woensdag 15 juni 2011  
klokke 15.00  
door

Jeroen Groenewegen

geboren te Naaldwijk in 1979

## **Promotiecommissie:**

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the archeology, art and material culture of  
China at Leiden University*

# Stellingen

1. Mainstream Chinese popmuziek draait om Taiwanese sterren en de VRC markt.
2. In China is *rock* een verzamelnaam voor alle populaire muziek die doet alsof andere dingen belangrijker zijn dan verkoopcijfers.
3. Folk- en volksmuziek zijn politiek beladen omdat ze claimen de volkswil weer te geven. Singer-songwriters staan ambivalent tegenover die overlevering.
4. Chinese popsterren kunnen makkelijker in films acteren dan Amerikaanse, omdat het Chinese publiek allang geaccepteerd heeft dat popmuziek niets te maken heeft met authenticiteit.
5. Tussen muziek en taal bestaat een nauwer verband dan tussen dans en taal, beeldende kunst en taal, film en taal, en literatuur en taal.
6. Bestudering van Chinese populaire muziek leidt niet tot (meer) kennis van China. Muziek is geen venster op cultuur, het *is* cultuur.
7. Popmuziek is het ideale verbindingselement tussen de massa's van de sociale wetenschappen, het alledaagse van antropologie en de kunst van de geesteswetenschappen.
8. De term *etnomusicologie* heeft een onprettige bijklank die vergelijkbaar is met die van *niet-westerse studies*, en beide moeten verdwijnen uit het wetenschappelijk vertoog. In plaats van *etnomusicologie* moeten we eenvoudig spreken van *musicologie*, en tegelijk zorgen dat de lading onder die vlag niet Eurocentrisch is.
9. Veldwerk moet. Je vindt andere dingen dan je zoekt.
10. Mede door Internet ligt het veld niet alleen meer daar, maar ook allang hier.
11. Er komen heel veel interessante Chinezen naar Nederland voor alle mogelijke optredens: wetenschappelijk, maatschappelijk, kunstzinnig. Nederlandse universiteiten doen daar veel te weinig mee.
12. Het schrijven van een proefschrift is niet als het bouwen van een huis maar als het schoonmaken ervan. Arme promotor.

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But it is not only because of the Internet that the field is no longer restricted to China. In the Netherlands, especially the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR), Borneoco (Constance Vos and Dieneke Koerts) and the Chinese Radio and Television (CRTV) have offered countless invaluable encounters and friendships, for instance with Li Ning, Ying Liang and Yiwen Wang. Chinese musicians were part of the Amsterdam China Festival (2005) and the Belgian Festival Europalia in 2009. In 2009 STEIM (Amsterdam) and WORM (Rotterdam) hosted shows with Chinese experimental musicians. Finally, the Leiden-based CHIME foundation is a meeting point for performers and researchers of Chinese music and I am indebted to its founders Frank Kouwenhoven and Antoinette Schimmelpenninck not only for an indispensable library but also for organizing a series of memorable performances.

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# Conventions

Song titles are marked by SMALL CAPS to distinguish them from book and film titles (which take *italics*) and journal articles, book chapters and so on (which take “double quotation marks”). In general, I have included the original-language title only when the work is first mentioned. However, I repeat the original title if the work features centrally more than once at widely separated points in the narrative. Throughout, I use full-form Chinese characters rather than simplified characters, because this research includes not only the People’s Republic of China (where simplified characters are the norm), but also Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, where simplified characters are used much less frequently.

Chinese popular culture demonstrates its international aspirations by the abundant use of English captions for books, albums and films adjacent to Chinese titles. However, the captions are rarely faithful translations of the original. For instance, on a 2007 album by Jay Chou, the English caption *On the Run* portrays the singer as an outlaw, whereas the Chinese title *Wo Hen Mang* 我很忙 (‘I’m very busy’) suggests a law-abiding white-collar employee! Despite these occasionally glaring discrepancies, I have used the self-styled English captions throughout. Translations of Chinese titles can be found in the bibliography, discography or filmography, depending on the kind of work to which they relate.

The same principle has informed my use of self-styled or received English names for places, persons, bands, venues, festivals and record companies. Chinese characters for the latter five groups are not given in the text but can be found in the glossary, with transliteration added in parentheses whenever the English name differs from the standard Chinese transliteration. In cases where people have no English name, I have transliterated their Chinese names using Hanyu pinyin, the most common transcription system. Additionally, I have not referred to people’s “real” or “original” names (e.g. He Guofeng or Albert Leung), but to their stage or pen names (e.g. Xiao He and Lam Chik), since in the present context it is the stage or pen name that is most real and original. In further references I use surnames (e.g. I use “Wong” instead of “Faye”), even though some academic publications have adopted the popular press’s habit of referring to pop singers by their given names. In the case of identifying these surnames, I can only ask the reader to be understanding of the cross-cultural complexities of this study. In self-styled English names, family names usually come last (Faye Wong), while in transliterated Chinese names, family names usually come first (Huang Liaoyuan). In a number of cases where singers use Chinese nicknames or pseudonyms, I either repeat the whole name (Zuoxiao Zuzhou) or refer to the second part of the name when it is clear that this is the family name, most notably in the case of Xiao He, which means ‘little river’ but is also a homonym of ‘little He’, with He being his ‘real’ family name.

In short, an English SONG TITLE may be followed by the Chinese title in full-form characters 題目 and the year of its first publication in any country (2007), corresponding to an album by the artist in the discography. If an artist has released several albums in a year, the month of publication is indicated in capitals after the publication year (2007DEC). All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

## Introduction: Framing the Self

對你說打錯了  
我不是你那個甚麼  
你想找的那個  
就算我跟她同名同姓又如何  
都說你打錯了  
我要欺騙你幹什麼  
你們多久沒見  
連我跟她的聲音你都不認得

你怎麼樣過  
甚麼樣的生活  
是否難耐寂寞  
你到底是誰  
總是陰差陽錯  
擦過我的耳朵

第幾次打錯了  
這是注定還是巧合  
誰是瑪格列特  
她知道你的著急一定很快樂  
你們發生甚麼  
還是你欠了她甚麼  
有甚麼捨不得  
她不住這裡你卻非找她不可

你們會講甚麼  
口氣會不會軟軟的  
你緊張得想哭  
多年後想起今天  
值得不值得

Tell you what, you've got the wrong number.  
I'm not your so-and-so,  
the one you're looking for.  
So what if she and I have the same name?  
I'm still telling you, you've got the wrong number.  
Why would I lie to you?  
How long have the two of you been apart?  
You can't even tell my voice from hers!

So how do you live,  
what kind of life?  
Are you unbearably lonely?  
Who are you, anyway?  
Ah, these fluke calls,  
forever screeching in my ears ...

Wrong number, for the umpteenth time!  
Is this fate or coincidence?  
Who is Margaret?  
She'd love it if she knew you were so worried.  
Did something happen with you and her,  
or do you owe her something?  
What's so hard about letting go?  
She doesn't live here, so why keep looking?

What would you talk about?  
Would you make it all sound sweet?  
You're so nervous, you wanna cry.  
Years from now, if you think about today,  
Was it really worth it?

In the following pages, I will discuss a set of lyrics, a sound, and an image, each by one of the three artists whose work has most centrally informed my research. The question that lies at the heart of this study is how lyrics, sounds, and images perform identity in Chinese popular music.

## §1 Identity

The above lyrics are of *WRONG NUMBER* 打錯了 (2001), from Faye Wong's eponymous album. It was her eighteenth album and her last for EMI. The song starts with an upbeat, syncopated bass riff to which a brass section adds a big band feel. The melody in the verses is energetic in the first three lines of each stanza, to drop in the fourth to lower registers that suggest intimacy. However, besides suggesting tongue-in-cheek playfulness, enhanced by Wong's comfortable mid-range and warm delivery, the music does not seem to have a strong connection with the lyrics. *WRONG NUMBER* is a cover, or rather, an adaptation, with a new arrangement by producer Alvin Leong, of *IT'S YOUR CHANCE* (2001), an English-language rock song by Singaporean singer Tanya Chua. Neither Chua's original, nor *THE EMPRESS' NEW CLOTHES* 女皇的新衣, Wong's Cantonese version of this song, mention a telephone, which most likely comes from Lam Chik, Wong's regular lyricist. Can we distinguish Faye Wong's signature from among those of her co-producers?

Not if we go by the lyrics, which suggest that the caller, a persistent fan, cannot recognize Wong's voice. Wong's true self remains elusive, which paradoxically reasserts her public persona of a cool and somewhat distant 'showbiz queen' 歌坛天后. Although the final verse offers the listener the option of disassociating from the caller, as someone who is overly anxious and will later feel regret, throughout the song, *you* still addresses the listener. Just like the caller, the listener is on the other side of the line, receiving the thoroughly mediated and disembodied sound without being heard in the recording. However, *WRONG NUMBER* makes the listener not a passive receiver but an accomplice. The listener is the ultimate co-producer.

Identities aren't exclusively or even primarily individual. They function within collectives. Translating 'identity' into Chinese is tricky, but pragmatic equivalents such as *shenfen* 身份 'status' and *rentong* 認同 'recognition' stress its social embeddedness. Next to a personal name and unique number, IDs (*shenfen zheng*, 身份証 'evidence of status') usually also categorize individuals as members of larger groups, defined by nationality, ethnicity, age, class, and gender. These solidly established criteria for identity are important to this study, whose first three chapters touch respectively upon issues of nationality and ethnicity; class and subculture; and gender.

However, rather than accepting these categories as natural and given, I follow Stuart Hall and others who argue that they are the result of historically and culturally contingent choices. Nationality, class and gender are not descriptions of anything that is objectively 'out there,' but socially accepted and functional concepts that embody a certain world view and that prescribe specific kinds of behavior. As Wim van der Meer writes:

There is no such thing as race. Of course, at any particular level we can (arbitrarily) define races, so as to distinguish several, dozens, hundreds, or

thousands of races. ... [F]rom the single origin of mankind there has been a differentiation of genetic constitutions, but there has always been an infinite chain of rehybridization that maintained the genetic pool in a constant flux. ... [I]dentities are similar to races; they do not really exist, but are constructed by sets of definitions. The racial paradigm has become more or less obsolete, but is by and large replaced by the concept of ethnicity. Music in the ontological sense of ‘our’ music (versus ‘their’ music) can play a tremendously important role in defining such identities.<sup>1</sup>

## §2 Articulating Links

Now to sound. As soon as they recognize the guitar riff of Second Hand Rose’s *THE TRAIN’S TAKING OFF* 火車快開 (2001), the Beijing audience starts clapping along enthusiastically to the song’s compelling four-beat. Vocalist Liang Long intersperses the lyrics with folksong-like, semantically empty fillers and mood particles, such as *a* 啊 and *neige* 那個. Each verse ends with a soothing ascending scale on electric guitar, imitating the sound of the accordion. Near the end of the song, the scale is suddenly replaced by a percussion part reminiscent of Northeastern Chinese *yangge* 秧歌, ‘rice sprout songs.’ The audience now respond by jumping up and down and shouting along with the chorus, sung by all band members in unison:

我們的生活就要開	Our lives are about to take off!
往哪兒開	Where to?
往哪兒開	Where to?

Then bass, acoustic and electric guitar join in for the finale. The electric guitar now plays the two-chord pattern (G-F) with a heavy distortion sound for extra energy. When the music abruptly stops, Liang Long, whose heavy drag make-up mixes with sweat, sings in a teasing, nasal voice: “then just guess,” after which the band plays the guitar riff of the opening one last time.

IDS, the national anthem, Faye Wong’s *WRONG NUMBER*, Second Hand Rose’s *THE TRAIN’S TAKING OFF* and other cultural products invite people into their worlds through moments of interpellation, when “the subject is hailed, the subject turns around, and the subject then accepts the terms by which he or she is hailed.”<sup>2</sup> In gender studies, Judith Butler has related this process of identity formation to performance:

Because there is neither an “essence” that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there

<sup>1</sup> Van der Meer 2005:60, 65.

<sup>2</sup> Butler 1995:6.

would be no gender at all. ... the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation.<sup>3</sup>

These mundane, repeated performances help form identities. *THE TRAIN'S TAKING OFF*, for instance, negotiates cultural identity by connecting rural Northeastern China, Beijing and the West. I interpret Van der Meer's "construction by sets of definitions" in terms of actor-network theory as articulating and consolidating connections, which Stuart Hall calls "non-necessary links:"

So it is the articulation, the non-necessary link, between a social force which is making itself, and the ideology or conceptions of the world[,] which makes intelligible the process [the Rastafarians] are going through, which begins to bring onto the historical stage a new social position and political position, a new set of social and political subjects.<sup>4</sup>

Identities are positions in a network, and hence are defined by their connections. This is also how music connects to society and politics. Through the collective singing of "we" by audience and performers, *THE TRAIN'S TAKING OFF* performs a generation of cheerful but relatively powerless witnesses of sweeping change. This articulation can be used to various political ends, and that is precisely the point. As is the case with all culture, music reflects and influences sociopolitical realities. At the same time, interpreting homologies between music and social reality is difficult to the point that passing judgment becomes a political act.

This study is partly a reaction against an overemphasis on politics in accounts of Chinese music that has insufficiently recognized popular music's polysemy. In 1983 Arnold Perris argued that in the People's Republic of China (hereafter PRC) "there is never a need to ask the question as the Western listener does in some context: What does this music 'mean'? Everyone knows what the music 'means.'"<sup>5</sup> In the 1990s, accounts of Chinese popular music tended to focus on rock music's rebelliousness, to the detriment of other readings and musics. Andrew Jones, for example, argues that pop "is not a mere adjunct to leisure" but a site of ideological struggle.<sup>6</sup> While pioneering studies by Jones, Andreas Steen and others remain extremely valuable, a dichotomous opposition of the People and the state is no longer tenable.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, I explore the issue of music's socio-political significance by tracing connections across the political spectrum, appreciating intermediate positions. Moreover, these articulations and connections are relative to

<sup>3</sup> Butler 2004:114.

<sup>4</sup> Hall 1996:142.

<sup>5</sup> Perris 1983:15.

<sup>6</sup> Jones 1992:3-4.

<sup>7</sup> Baranovitch 2003:1-9, Fung 2008.

specific issues. As such, I build on trends in the emerging field of Chinese popular music studies, with major contributions by Jones, Steen, Nimrod Baranovitch, Jeroen de Kloet, Marc L. Moskowitz and Anthony Fung, who have addressed cultural identity and gender.

<sup>8</sup> At the same time I hope to open up other themes for investigation, such as classification, theatricality and creativity.

However, by itself this thematic approach does not solve the thorny issue of music's socio-political significance. Pierre Bourdieu has described the contingent homologies between the semi-autonomous fields of cultural production and the fields of economy and power, especially focusing on the articulation of class through distinction and taste. In the realm of music, for instance, love songs offer culturally specific scripts or technologies for dealing with real-life situations, while their deliberate polysemy and ambiguity simultaneously invite people to reinterpret and appropriate these songs with reference to their own experience.

### §3 World Making

And then there's image. In 2009 Xiao He published his second solo album, *The Performance of Identity* 身份的表演. It does not contain authentic, Dylanesque folksongs of a lovelorn soul, as its predecessor *Birds that Can Fly High Don't Land on the Backs of Oxen that Can't Run Fast* 飛的高的鳥不落在跑不快的牛的背上 (2002) did. Rather, *The Performance of Identity* a collection of improvised explorations of the human voice and electronic equipment, and of the connections and disconnections between acoustic guitar and vocal melody. There are no paraphrasable lyrics on the album, and similarly, the title on the cover is written in highly ornamental and barely legible handwriting. Xiao He's name is nowhere to be found, but his picture is on the cover. With a construction worker's helmet on his head, the towel of a member of the working class around his neck, the armband of a Red Guard around his arm, a girly stocking with embroidered



Illustration 0.1: Xiao He on the cover of his 2009 album *The Performance of Identity*.

<sup>8</sup> Baranovitch 2003, De Kloet 2010, Moskowitz 2010, Fung 2008.

shoe on one leg, and the face-paint of a Peking Opera student-role 小生 on his face, and a garishly red, wide-open mouth, the image suggests that identity can be changed and pieced together like clothes.<sup>9</sup>

Popular music performances offer opportunities to people to articulate and piece their identities together, argues Tia DeNora in *Music in Everyday Life* (2000):

The most interesting questions concerning the social implications of artifacts (whether these are technologies, utterances or aesthetic materials such as music) focus on the interactional level where articulations – links – between humans, scenes and environments are actually produced, and where frames of order come to be stabilized and destabilized in real time. With regard to the issue of musical affect [sic], recognizing music as ... an affordance structure [meaning a structure that favors certain usages over others] allows for music to be understood ... as a place or space for ‘work’ or meaning and lifeworld making. Music can, in other words, be invoked as an ally for a variety of world-making activities, it is a workspace for semiotic activity, a resource for doing, being and naming the aspects of social reality, including the realities of subjectivity and self.<sup>10</sup>

In this study I retrace how Chinese popular music affords the piecemeal work of world making. I do so by interpreting artworks and their producers rather than audience reception. As such my methodology is based in the humanities and leans on semiotics and hermeneutics. Inevitably this has led to choices and arguments that are informed by my own ethical and political viewpoints. At the same time, extensive fieldwork has inspired an ethnographic approach that links detailed observations to large-scale social, political, economic and cultural trends and events.<sup>11</sup> I conducted formal and informal interviews, attended concerts, studio recordings and band rehearsals, and collected albums, magazines and biographies during visits in 2006 (2 months; Hong Kong and Beijing), 2007 (6 months; Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Taiwan), 2008 (3 months; Beijing) and shorter periods in 2009 and 2010. Additionally, I have found support for my findings in surveys and reviews provided by others.

A first step towards tracing popular music’s links is to treat it as a sound-image-text complex. Sounds are definitive of music, but pictures on album and magazine covers and the discourses of lyrics and online forums are hardly peripheral to musical stardom. Moreover, music is synesthetic, as we may feel that we recognize the signature of Faye Wong’s public image through her unique sound. The above discussions of Wong’s text, Second Hand Rose’s sound and Xiao He’s image illustrate that all these things sing, show and speak. Additionally, the inseparability of the text, sound, and image echoes the performance situation of Chinese traditional musics, many of which are translated into

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<sup>9</sup> 21CN 2009.

<sup>10</sup> DeNora 2000:40.

<sup>11</sup> cf. Bal 2002:133-174.

English as *opera*.

Not only in definitions of music, also in terms of time and space, the scope of this study is wide. Including historical context, it stretches from 1910 to 2010 and from Singapore to Xinjiang. Focus and cogency are provided by the five themes that have informed the division into chapters – place; genre and classification; sex, gender and desire; theatricality; and organizing music – and by in-depth study of the three lead characters Faye Wong, Xiao He and Second Hand Rose. They make very different kinds of music, which offers opportunities for the inclusion of contrasting viewpoints in ways that would have been difficult had I only studied, say, mainstream pop stars. In terms of time, I focus on the 1990s and early 2000s. In terms of space, I focus on the main centers of production in this period: Hong Kong, Beijing and Taipei. Beijing is perhaps overrepresented, as all three lead characters currently reside there. To mitigate this bias, I have included case studies of predominantly Taiwan and Hong Kong pop stars.

The geographic bias of this study is the result of earlier connections in Beijing, which emerged during fieldwork for my MA thesis, and expanded during my PhD research.<sup>12</sup> In 2005 I was able to arrange for six bands from China, including Second Hand Rose, to perform in Amsterdam. Xiao He performed in Belgium and the Netherlands in 2007 and 2009. He named his second solo album after this study, which was then still in the making. The album contains recordings I made at a show that I organized in Beijing. In 2007 I worked as a volunteer in the company of Zhang Yadong, who has produced a number of Faye Wong's albums. Also through international festivals, such as the International Film Festival Rotterdam and Europalia in Belgium, and through the Internet, the boundaries between scholarship (Leiden) and the field (China) have become blurred. I have become a participant, co-producing the world I claim to investigate. I can only hope that, even if you've got the wrong number, what you'll find in this book will help you to engage and create worlds of your own.

---

<sup>12</sup> Groenewegen 2005.

# Chapter 1: Place

## §1 Chinese Popular Music

After introducing the singer and describing his migration from Malaysia to Singapore and his recent popularity in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and all over the Chinese diaspora, the anchor [of the 1995 May 1<sup>st</sup> Concert] asked Wu [Qixian] how he defined himself in the final analysis. The musician's reply, "I am Chinese" (*wo shi Zhongguoren*), which stirred a most enthusiastic and warm response from the audience, encapsulated everything Wu's participation stood for, at least from the point of view from the state... By inviting ... *gangtai* singers to participate in concerts and television programs, the Chinese state is not engaged so much in competing with other Chinese politics and identities ... but rather in contesting their independence and in co-opting them into a greater Chinese nationalism, of which China is the core. In other words, the Chinese state is engaged in appropriating the concept of Greater China (*Da Zhonghua*).<sup>1</sup>

*Gangtai* is a 1980s PRC term for highly successful cultural products from Hong Kong (*xiang gang*) and Taiwan. In the above quotation, Nimrod Baranovitch rightly recognizes Hong Kong and Taiwan as major areas of production of Chinese pop music. However, like his major influences Andrew Jones and Jin Zhaojun, Baranovitch defines Chinese popular music as the music of the PRC. Both his monograph *China's New Voices* (2003) and the 1995 May 1<sup>st</sup> Concert presented Beijing as the core of Greater China. The counter discourse of many Hong Kong and Taiwanese anthologies of popular music is to focus on their own local histories, presenting the PRC, Japan and South-East Asia as external markets.

Unfortunately, both of these approaches disregard the transnational identity of megastars such as Teresa Teng, Andy Lau, Faye Wong and Jay Chou.<sup>2</sup> In the following pages, I first argue that *gangtai* should be part of an account of Chinese popular music.<sup>3</sup> I then explore further the 'Chineseness' of Chinese popular music by addressing the sinification of rock and the globalization of folk.

These debates relate to issues of language. *Gangtai* does not refer to a geographical area in a strict sense, since Baranovitch includes the Malaysian singer Wu Qixian, aka Eric Moo. I define *gangtai*, and by extension Chinese popular music as a whole, cultural-

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<sup>1</sup> Baranovitch 2003:231-233.

<sup>2</sup> Chang 2003, Tzeng 1998, Huang 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lee 2002, Gold 1993:918, Yang 1997.

ly – or rather, linguistically. In this thesis, China denotes *Da Zhonghua* 大中華, ‘Greater China, Chinese nation’, rather than *Zhongguo* 中國 ‘China, the Chinese nation-state.’ Chinese popular music is popular music in any of the ethnically Chinese peoples’ (*hua* 華) oral languages (*yu* 語).

The first question to be asked is: can spoken language be defining for Chinese pop music? Are Teresa Teng’s Japanese ballads and Joyside’s English punk songs part of Chinese pop? How about instrumental music? Secondly, can ethnicity be defining for Chinese pop music? Are singers of Puyuma, Tibetan and Hmong descent excluded? Thirdly, since “the Chinese state is engaged in appropriating the concept of Greater China,” how can I write a study that respects both the difference and the interconnectedness of the popular music of these areas? In other words, is it possible to maintain that “the configuration of pop culture China is substantively and symbolically without centre,” as the Singaporean scholar Chua Ben-Huat argues?<sup>4</sup>

Finally, questions as to spoken language inevitably raise the question of its alphabetic representation: Hanyu 漢語 Pinyin for the PRC and increasingly for the international media; Wade-Giles for Taiwanese Mandarin 國語; and various romanizations for Cantonese, Taiwanese and Hakka. These different writing systems continue the contestation over China in the names of locations, songs and people. Does Baranovitch’s romanization ‘Wu Qixian’ not already imply a kowtow (*ketou*, *k’e-t’ou*) to Beijing (Peking)?<sup>5</sup> Throughout this thesis, I follow idiosyncratic but widely accepted English names such as Eric Moo, where these exist. In all other cases, I use Hanyu Pinyin.

## §2 A Regional History of Pop

The following subsections investigate the successive shifts of the center of Chinese popular music from Shanghai, to Hong Kong, to Taipei in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These developments are partly overlapping, demonstrating the transnational nature of Chinese pop. I intend to analyze the constitution and interaction of five levels of place: local (areas or cities within states, such as Shaanxi or Shanghai); state (such as the PRC or Singapore); regional (such as Greater China or East Asia); global; and finally, placeless or escapist. In this constellation, the state and regional levels are constantly under threat of collapsing into the national. The ability of Chinese pop stars to balance these five levels and play them off against each other is part of the stars’ appeal.



Illustration 1.1: Map of East and South Asia.

<sup>4</sup> Chua 2000:116-117.

<sup>5</sup> Baranovitch makes an exception for PRC female singer Wayhwa (Baranovitch 2003:176-186).

## 1930s-1940s Shanghai

The history of Chinese popular music starts with Li Jinhui (1891-1967) in the May Fourth period (1919-1927). With a background in Confucian classics and ritual and the folk music of Hunan, Li was also, according to the modernizing spirit of the times, taught School Songs 學堂歌曲: Japanese and European school songs and Protestant hymns with optimistic and nationalistic lyrics in vernacular Chinese.<sup>6</sup> When Li started composing music himself, he was persuaded by his brother Li Jinxi to promote Mandarin (based on the Beijing dialect) as the national language. His first success was with educational song-books that used Chinese folk tunes, rather than Japanese or European songs. Subsequently, in the early 1920s, he founded the Bright Moon 明月 song and dance troupe to perform these tunes. Li Jinhui moved to Shanghai in 1926, and it was in the jazz clubs, ballrooms and radio stations of this cosmopolis that his career really took off.<sup>7</sup>

In “The Incantation of Shanghai: Singing a City into Existence,” Isabel Wong takes us back to 1930s and 1940s Shanghai, when the ‘golden voice’ of Zhou Xuan sang NIGHT SHANGHAI 夜上海：

The original Pathé recording of “Night Shanghai” begins with a brief instrumental passage that imitates the sounds of car horns and city traffic. The song has a diatonic melody ... in a simple a-a-b-a scheme typical of Tin Pan Alley ballads, and is set to a foxtrot rhythm. The jazz-like accompaniment is provided by a small ensemble that includes piano, saxophone, and drums. As was the case with many popular songs of the period, the orchestra for the recording was provided by White Russian musicians who were in the employ of the Pathé Company, giving the song a Western veneer to increase its appeal to trendy, westernized Chinese consumers.<sup>8</sup>

Zhou Xuan is one of the many well-known singers that Li Jinhui’s Bright Moon troupe produced.<sup>9</sup> This, and the budding film industry, contributed to a star system that eventually eclipsed Li himself; he took his troupe on a last tour through the major cities of China, as well as Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Singapore, in 1935.<sup>10</sup> These first pop stars used global sounds, the north Chinese dialect and Chinese folk tunes to attract audiences locally in Shanghai and throughout China and Asia. Later, this sound signified nostalgia for the Shanghai of the 1930s, both among the large flows of émigrés that went to Hong Kong and Taiwan in 1949, and among contemporary Shanghainese.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Chen 2007

<sup>7</sup> Jones 2001, Wong 2002, Sun 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Wong 2002:247.

<sup>9</sup> These also include Li’s daughter Li Minghui and Wang Renmei. On Zhou, cf. Zhou 1987, Stock 1995, Shen 1999, Steen 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Jones 2001:101. Cf. Li Xianglan (Yamaguchi Yoshiko) in Wang:2007.

At the time, Zhou Xuan and Li Jinhui's music presented a solution to the dilemma of modernity<sup>11</sup> – the dilemma, in the Chinese context, of becoming both modern and Chinese. However, their solution was rejected by both conservatory and leftist composers. The May Fourth composers who established the first Chinese conservatories found Li's musical borrowings vulgar and harmful to their ideal of a strong national music modeled after nineteenth-century European classical music.<sup>12</sup> Leftist composers found Li's music too imperialist, escapist and even pornographic – “yellow” or “soft,” in the words of the former student of Li Jinhui and composer of the national anthem, Nie Er.<sup>13</sup> The Communists banned “yellow music” as early as 1934, and the founding of the PRC in Beijing in 1949 marked the end of the first chapter of Chinese popular music.

### 1960s-1970s Hong Kong

During the 1950s and 1960s, pop songs in the style of Shanghai were called “songs of the times” 時代曲 in Hong Kong and Taiwan. At first, the film and music industries continued in Hong Kong as they had in Shanghai. Both Grace Chang and Rebecca Pan were born in Shanghai and became famous by singing Mandarin songs in Hong Kong. Pan became an ambassador for Chinese music, performing her Mandarin folk tunes and Shanghai-style mandapop all over Asia and the West. Chang is especially remembered for her role in the musical *Mambo Girl* 曼波女郎 in 1957, which mixes a singing teen story with traditional melodrama, as well as for her performance before the Nationalist generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in 1955.

However, in the 1960s the development of mandapop came to a standstill. This was partly the result of the rising popularity of Anglo-American pop, fueled by a 1964 Beatles concert in Hong Kong and the presence of American troops for the war in Vietnam. Local youths formed their own bands, such as Lotus and later the Wynners. Initially singing in English, these bands started singing in Cantonese when they were asked to create theme songs for films. Sam Hui's *Games Gamblers Play* 鬼馬雙星 (1974) was the first cantopop album. It was also the soundtrack of the Hong Kong blockbuster of the same name, a comedy directed by Sam Hui's brother Michael. The album addressed local sociopolitical issues in simple and humorous language. Similarly, Sam's albums *The Last Message* 天才與白痴 (1975) and *The Private Eyes* 半斤八兩 (1976) rode along on the promotional activity of the films of his brother, while adopting a working-class perspective. But in contrast to his approach in the debut album, which borrowed from Cantonese opera tunes and English songs, Sam Hui now composed most of the music himself.<sup>14</sup>

Twenty-five years after the last large influx of refugees in 1949, these films, albums and later televised soap series were seminal in articulating an emerging Hong Kong identity vis-à-vis both British and Chinese culture.<sup>15</sup> Compared to mandapop, cantopop

<sup>11</sup> Alitto 1986.

<sup>12</sup> Jones 2001:103,104.

<sup>13</sup> Jones 2001:117.

<sup>14</sup> Man 1998.

<sup>15</sup> McIntyre 2002:240. Chen 2007a. Especially in this early period, the Cantonese used is a pronunciation of

distances itself from the Shanghai pops of the 1930s, drawing rather on Anglo-American and Japanese musical developments. Furthermore, whereas most mandapop stars were female, cantopop was dominated by male singers such as Sam Hui, George Lam, Roman Tam, and the Wynners' frontman Alan Tam. Finally, the development of television and the tabloid press enabled cantopop singers to engage in a host of (commercial) activities and to become all-round stars and celebrities in the 1980s.

In the 1980s and 1990s, cantopop became a central form of entertainment in the wider region, featuring prominently on radio (RTHK), on television (TVB), in cinemas and in karaoke parlors, as well as in the notorious Hong Kong tabloid press. Music concerts offered movie stars an opportunity to cement fans' loyalty. Singers such as Anita Mui and Leslie Cheung set records for selling out the 12,500 seats of the Hong Kong Coliseum (opened in 1983) for weeks on end, treating audiences to outrageously expensive dresses, re-enactments of film scenes, guest performances by fellow artists and extensive hilarious or intimate anecdotes. Many of the songs were covers, or rather adaptations 改變曲 of Japanese or other foreign hits with Cantonese lyrics. This practice reached its peak between 1984 and 1990, when hits often included words or phrases in the original language, alongside the Cantonese.<sup>16</sup>

### 1970s-1980s Taiwan

Not unlike Hong Kong, which developed an early music industry of dance songs and excerpts from Cantonese opera, Taiwan developed a music industry with songs in the local Taiwanese language between 1932 and 1937.<sup>17</sup> The Second World War and its aftermath (1937-1949) thwarted this development, while the influx of mainland Chinese in 1949 brought different tastes as well as restrictions on (non-Mandarin) popular culture. Although Taiwanese popular music continued, the mainstream of the 1960s, called *remenqu* 熱門曲 at the time, mainly consisted of English hits and Mandarin covers of Japanese tunes. During the 1970s, Taiwan became the center of mandapop, a status it confirmed by producing East-Asian superstars like Au Yueng Fei-fei, Tracy Huang and especially Teresa Teng.<sup>18</sup>

Born in 1953 as a daughter of Mainlanders, Teresa Teng started her career at age eleven by singing Hubei folk opera tunes and Shanghai-style mandapop. Her repertoire expanded with adaptations of Taiwanese, Cantonese, Japanese and English songs, and with songs written for her by a host of international songwriters in a host of languages. In 1973 she moved to Japan, where she was awarded 'best upcoming artist' in 1975. The album series *Love Songs of an Island Nation* 島國情歌, published in Hong Kong between 1975 and 1981, contains most of Teng's mandapop hits, many of them adaptations of her Japanese songs. By the early 1980s, she was becoming popular in the PRC, which had

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written Chinese, and not colloquial Cantonese. For an argument for the pivotal influence of the budding television industry on the creation of a Hong Kong identity in the 1970s and 1980s, see Ma 1999:25-44.

<sup>16</sup> Ogawa 2001:121-130.

<sup>17</sup> On Taiwan cf. Tsai 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Lockard 1998:244.

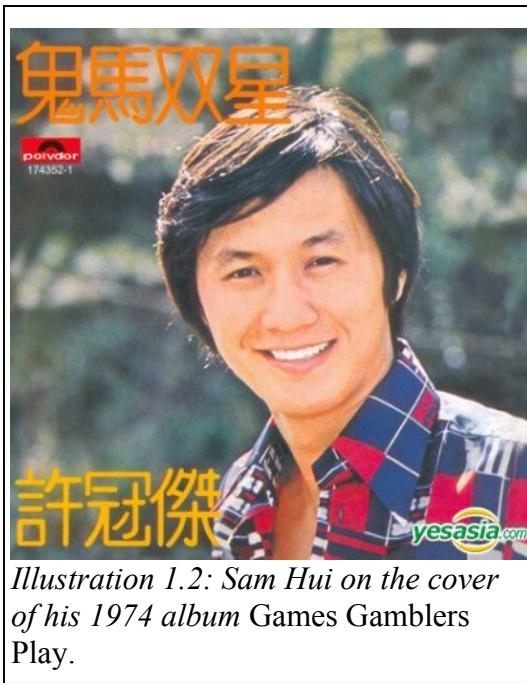


Illustration 1.2: Sam Hui on the cover of his 1974 album *Games Gamblers Play*.

opened up in 1978 after the devastating years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). The reintroduction of Zhou Xuan's songs by Teresa Teng, though strongly desired by audiences, remained politically sensitive. This resulted in heated debates and a short ban during the 'Eliminate Spiritual Pollution' campaign of 1983-1984.<sup>19</sup> When Teresa Teng suddenly died from an asthma attack in Thailand in 1995, governments and audiences throughout East Asia offered their condolences. An editorial in the semi-official Taiwanese magazine *Sinorama*'s special edition on Teresa Teng reads:

In Japan, a TV program also mourned her passing. ... It was very moving for Chinese to see her made so happy by affirmation she won in a foreign land, but also made it that much more saddening to think that she is really gone.<sup>20</sup>

Editor-in-chief Sunny Hsiao presented Teresa Teng's "road of struggle and success in Japan" as a victory for Chinese culture. On the other hand, since many of Teng's Chinese hits were covers of her Japanese songs, her success might also have suggested Japanese cultural imperialism.<sup>21</sup> But Teresa Teng's career can also be seen as exemplifying an Asian or East-Asian popular music scene in which the differences between Japanese, Taiwanese, Chinese and Korean popular music are increasingly irrelevant.

Contemporary with Teng's regional and transnational successes, Taipei citizens started to reconsider their position vis-à-vis the Mainland and local culture and languages. Debate fermented around Taiwan's retreat from the United Nations in 1971 to make way for the PRC, and the pro-democracy Kaohsiung incident of 1979, but also around Campus Song 校園歌曲. During a musical performance at the Tamkang University in 1976, Li Shuang-tse climbed on stage and smashed a Coke bottle, shouting: "Why do you all sing Western stuff? Where are our own songs?"

Campus Song's position on Taiwan's relations with China is not unequivocal. Whereas Li's FORMOSA 美麗島 became an anthem for the pro-independence DDP (in the version by the politically engaged singers Yang Tsu-Chuen and Kimbo), his YOUNG CHINA 少年中國 was banned for being too pro-China.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the cry for regional solidarity across various Asian states of Hou Te-chien's major hit DESCENDANTS OF THE DRAGON 龍的傳人 has both supported the governments in Taipei and Beijing and challenged them:

<sup>19</sup> Stock 1995, Steen 2000, Jones 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Hsiao 1995:1. *Sinorama* is a bilingual magazine. I quote the English text; the Chinese does not contain a reference to the viewpoint of the author here, therefore I do not know which China is meant. Cf. Hsiao 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Gold 1993:913-914.

<sup>22</sup> On Lo's transnational pop stardom, cf. Barmé 1999:128, Ma 2009.

遙遠的東方有一條江，	In the faraway east is a stream.
它的名字就叫長江。	Its name is the endless stream.
遙遠的東方有一條河，	In the faraway east is a river.
它的名字就叫黃河。	Its name is the yellow river.
雖不曾看見長江美，	Although I never saw the beauty of that endless stream,
夢裡常神游長江水。	in dreams I often swim in its endless water.
雖不曾聽見黃河壯，	Although I never heard the grandeur of that yellow river,
澎湃洶湧在夢裡。	its surging tempests are in my dreams.

古老的東方有一條龍，	In the ancient east is a dragon.
它的名字就叫中國。	Its name is china.
古老的東方有一群人，	In the ancient east is a people,
他們全都是龍的傳人。	all of them descendants of the dragon.
巨龍腳底下我成長，	Under the claws of this great dragon I grew up,
長成以後是龍的傳人。	growing up to be a descendant of the dragon...
黑眼睛黑頭髮黃皮膚，	Black eyes, black hair, yellow skin,
永永遠遠是龍的傳人。	forever-ever a descendant of the dragon.

百年前寧靜的一個夜，	On a silent night a hundred years ago,
巨變前夕的深夜裡，	on the eve of great change, in the depth of night,
槍炮聲敲碎了寧靜夜。	bomb blasts crushed the silence.
四面楚歌是姑息的劍。	Besieged on all sides are those blessed swords.
多少年炮聲仍隆隆，	How many years before the bomb blasts fade?
多少年又是多少年，	How long does a long time last ?
巨龍巨龍你擦亮眼	Great, great dragon, remove the scales from your eyes,
永永遠遠地擦亮眼，	forever-ever remove the scales from your eyes!

DESCENDANTS OF THE DRAGON is sung to a four-beat with the last character of the two-measure phrases stretched over the last half of the second measure. This regular and repetitive pace is somewhat slower than marching rhythms, but feels more persistent. The rhythm renders the song suitable for singing at large gatherings, and to me these associations also strengthen its sense of inevitability and urgency.

Geremie Barmé points out that Hou's mighty dragon can be both empowering and oppressive.<sup>23</sup> In his life, Hou seemed to have engaged with various 'dragons.' Born in Taiwan, Hou moved to Beijing in 1983. After Hou's propaganda value for the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter, CCP) was exhausted, he contributed to the development of popular music in the PRC, introducing new equipment, recording techniques and knowledge. Hong Kong pop singers performed as early as the the 1984 Chinese New Year Gala

<sup>23</sup> Barmé 1999:227. Cf. Jaivin 2001.

of Chinese Central Television (hereafter, CCTV), and in the course of the 1980s first Li Guyi and later many other popular singers emerged out of the state-sponsored system, including Hou's girlfriend Cheng Lin.

In 1989 *DESCENDANTS OF THE DRAGON* resurfaced as a patriotic song for student protesters. During those tumultuous weeks Hou performed in Tian'anmen square and participated in a hunger strike. Finally, after the massacre of June 4<sup>th</sup> 1989, the PRC secretly deported him to Taiwan. Hou Te-chien's support for the 1989 protests, his Taiwanese background and his pan-Chinese patriotism all render his place in the history of Chinese popular music controversial.<sup>24</sup>

### 1989 in Beijing, Singapore and Hong Kong

1989 was a turbulent year for Chinese popular music, and there are varying interpretations of its events and the kind of China they represent. Next to *DESCENDANTS OF THE DRAGON*, another song that might be the soundtrack of the Tian'anmen Square massacre is Cui Jian's *NOTHING TO MY NAME* 一無所有. Together with the song *LET THE WORLD BE FULL OF LOVE* 讓世界充滿愛, Cui's 1986 hit had marked an emancipatory move in PRC pop music, acknowledged by the acceptance of the officially-sanctioned pop vocal style 通俗唱法 in official singing contests. The ensuing Northwest Wind 西北風 of 1988 and 1989 has been well documented, by Baranovitch, Jin Zhaojun and others, as a musical reaction of rough, bold Northern China against the saccharine South. Hou Te-chien's role as the composer of another important Northwest Wind song, *XIN TIANYOU* 信天游, has been ignored or explained as part of the root-seeking 尋根 spirit of the time. Baranovitch writes:

The fast tempo and strong beat of Northwest Wind songs, which were enhanced by an aggressive bass line, were the opposite of the slow beat that was found in most *gangtai* songs and their mainland counterparts. The difference, however, was not only limited to rhythm and tempo. In contrast to the stepwise melodies and the soft, sweet, restrained, and highly polished singing style of most *liuxing/tongsu* [pop] songs of the time, *xibeifeng* [Northwest Wind] songs had large leaps in their melodic line, and they were sung loudly and forcefully, almost like yelling, in what many Chinese writings described as a bold, unconstrained, rough, and primitive voice. The new style was a kind of musical reaction against the style of songs from Taiwan and Hong Kong introduced on the mainland almost a decade earlier. ... The struggle for cultural hegemony between China on the one hand and Taiwan and Hong Kong on the other has been, at least since the early 1980s, an inseparable part of popular music culture and discourse on the mainland. Northern Shaanxi Province, the geographical location associated with the new style, was significant in the context of this power struggle, since it is con-

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<sup>24</sup> Hou 1990.



Illustration 1.3: Cover of Dick Lee's *Orientalism* (1991).

sidered to be, by all Chinese, both in and outside China, the cradle of Chinese civilization.<sup>25</sup>

The album *The Mad Chinaman* (1989) by the Singaporean artist Dick Lee presents a very different China. Although Lee's lyrics are predominantly in English, he uses Mandarin, Malay and Singlish to signify the complexity of modern Singapore and Asia. Songs such as *LET'S ALL SPEAK MANDARIN* ridicule the language policy of the Singaporean government. Christopher Wee mildly criticizes Dick Lee for the obscurity of the hybrids on Lee's 1991 album *Orientalism*:

First, Lee sings, in Mandarin, a famous folksong, "Alishan" (A-lishan), that virtually every Chinese Singaporean of Lee's age would know. Then ... an English response follows. Alishan is a famous mountain in Taiwan, and the home of Taiwanese aboriginals, rather than the revered, truly Han Chinese. In his response, Lee completely identifies with this landscape of the mind that is not even, purely speaking, Chinese: "Mountain is calling to me. .../ Alishan is my own / I'll never leave home / Alishan is where my spirit will be free." It seems to me that Lee's conception here of what it means for him as an English-educated, Southeast Asian-born Chinese-Singaporean, to identify with (this mis-read version of) China, is becoming incoherent.<sup>26</sup>

By revealing its incoherence, Wee shows Lee's China is a fantastic and incoherent construction. Koichi Iwabuchi's book chapter, "Is Asia still one? The Japanese appropriation and appreciation of Dick Lee," similarly foregrounds how Lee's music both enables and questions an imagined unified Asia (rather than China). In short, Dick Lee complicates Baranovitch's claim that Northern Shaanxi Province is considered to be the cradle of Chinese civilization by all Chinese, both inside and outside China. Chineseness is performed, and does not need to be incontestable to function. Then again, since Dick Lee's main success is with predominantly English songs performed outside the PRC, should he be mentioned at all in relation to Chinese pop? Although Lee relocated to Hong Kong where he wrote music for Leslie Cheung, Jacky Cheung, Sandy Lam and other stars, is he even Chinese?<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Baranovitch 2003:19-20.

<sup>26</sup> Wee 2001:258.

<sup>27</sup> Lee contributed to Sandy Lam's album *Wildflower* 野花 (1991), Leslie Cheung's *CHASE* 追 (1995, theme song of the 1994 film *He's a Woman, She's a Man* 金枝玉葉) and Jacky Cheung's musical *Snow Wolf Lake* 雪狼湖 (1997) (Ho 2003:151).

On May 27<sup>th</sup> 1989, the entire Hong Kong pop scene participated in the fund-raising concert Democratic Songs for China 民主歌聲獻中華, organized by Anita Mui for the protest movement in Beijing. The funds collected were ceremonially handed over to Hou Te-chien. This event and the ‘Procession of Global Chinese’ 全球華人大遊行 the following day stressed the ethnic and cultural connectedness between Hong Kong and China.<sup>28</sup> John Erni argues that 1989 also raised the political consciousness of Hong Kong audiences and artists. It made them aware of Hong Kong’s fragile position in the world and triggered ambiguous reactions towards the upcoming return of Hong Kong to the PRC.<sup>29</sup> Wai-Chung Ho also sees 1989 as a turning point, but argues that it contributed to the harmonious unity of (the popular music of) Hong Kong and the PRC:

The [prospect of the] handover motivated Hong Kong popular artists to embrace the concept of ‘harmony’ and use music to spread the political message of joy over reintegration with the PRC ... The centrality of Hong Kong popular song sung in Putonghua [Mandarin] also acts as a construction of Chinese national identity among the Hong Kong, mainland Chinese and Taiwanese popular artists.

<sup>30</sup>

## The Handover of Hong Kong, 1997

The cantopop scene of the 1990s was dominated by the ‘Four Heavenly Kings’ 四大天王, namely Jacky Cheung, Leon Lai, Aaron Kwok and Andy Lau. All recorded Mandarin songs, but Andy Lau’s CHINESE 中國人, which he performed at the of Hong Kong handover ceremony on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1997, counts as one of the most salient gestures towards the PRC government and market.

The clip, recorded on the Great Wall, shows Andy Lau wearing a white Mao suit and flanked by flag-bearers who wave red banners with the song title in black characters.

It also shows him with a group of Chinese children from the PRC who are waving their hands to the strong, march-like rhythm of the song. During the handover ceremony, the red flags were exchanged for a number of dragons-on-poles, ‘flying’ energetically over the stage. This majestic performance style resembles that of PRC official folk singers, and Lee



*Illustration 1.4: Andy Lau performing CHINESE at the Hong Kong handover ceremony on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1997.*

<sup>28</sup> Witzleben 1999:249.

<sup>29</sup> Erni 2004:11,17,18.

<sup>30</sup> Ho 2000:350.

Tai-dow and Huang Yingfen argue that this accounts for the song's popularity in Hong Kong:

It evoked a 'feel good' response to the 1997 hand-over of sovereignty. It evoked a collective sense of Chinese nationalism, enunciated by a Hong Kong singer.<sup>31</sup>

五千年的風和雨啊	Five thousand years of wind and rain, yeah,
藏了多少夢	have hidden how many dreams?
黃色的臉黑色的眼	Yellow faces, black eyes,
不變是笑容	unchanging are the smiles.
八千里山川河岳	Eight thousand miles of mountains and rivers,
像是一首歌	just like a song.
不論你來自何方	No matter where you come from,
將去向何處	or where you will go.
一樣的淚一樣的痛	The same tears, the same pain.
曾經的苦難	The troubles we went through
我們 留在 心中	we keep in our minds.
一樣的血一樣的種	The same blood, the same race.
未來還有夢	The future still holds dreams
我們 一起 開拓	that we'll pioneer together!
手牽著手不分你我	Hand in hand, sharing everything,
昂首向前走	raising our heads, striding forwards,
讓世界知道	letting the world know:
我們 都是 中國人	We are all Chinese!

This song seems to underscore Wai-Chung Ho's contention that cantopop stars spread the political message of joy over reintegration with the PRC. The single was cut out in the shape of the PRC, including Hong Kong.

CHINESE is not the only popular song that merits discussion in relation to the hand-over of Hong Kong. In 1995 Andy Lau covered the Cantonese YESTEREVE ON THE STAR FERRY 昨晚的渡輪上, which, with its reference to Hong Kong's familiar Star Ferry, rekindled a sense of belonging to Hong Kong.<sup>32</sup> Beijing-based singer Ai Jing's MY 1997 我的1997 takes the viewpoint of a struggling musician in the PRC, and positions the hand-over in a pragmatic, opportunistic frame, rather than one of national or international politics.<sup>33</sup> In QUEEN'S ROAD EAST 皇后大道東 (1991), the Taiwanese Lo Ta-yu sings the Cantonese lyrics of the Hong Kong lyricist Lam Chik, taking a position of cynical abandon-

<sup>31</sup> Lee 2002:105, 106, cf. Fung 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Erni 2004:19.

<sup>33</sup> Baranovitch 2003:162-169.

ment that mocks the declining rule of the British crown. The satirical use of Mao suits and military images in the clip strengthens the message.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, John Erni offers a view about the role of cantopop in the handover of Hong Kong that contrasts sharply with Wai-Chung Ho's argument:

The various genres [of cantopop] representing the sentimental, the banal and the politically ambivalent, all seem to enter into the extended condition of a broken record. What this does, I think, is to render a possibility of rejecting the idea of depth ... There is a certain kind of *so-whatness* in the vernacular aesthetic of Cantopop, an aesthetic that espouses an attitude of indifference toward the struggle for love, roots, home, cultural inheritance, or boundaries. ... During the height of the massive emigration in the mid-1990s, during the events of Tienanmen Square, and now during times of postcolonial blues, many people in Hong Kong were and are still in search of this sense of *so-whatness* and wish to use it as a cultural front that would more or less help us ease our way into the possible future.<sup>35</sup>

This 'so-whatness' corresponds to the level of escapism or placelessness in my analytical approach to place. Cantopop also negotiates the conflicting alliances with Hong Kong, Britain and the PRC by offering dream worlds. Faye Wong's music and stardom are a prime example.

## Faye Wong

The bow of a small fishing boat floats on a still lake surrounded by mountains, reenacting a traditional Chinese landscape painting. Following an otherworldly introduction of fifths in the string melodies – possibly inspired by Björk – a slow, electronically generated drumbeat, flutes, and high *bel canto* background vocals complete the dramatic setting. Footsteps: a silhouette walks on the lake's shore. Electronic bleeps echo like drops of rain, forecasting the first verse. Out of focus, the camera glides over what seems a medieval European dinner table – candles, big pieces of bread and tin mugs of milk – towards Faye Wong, with curled hair, looking past the camera into the darkness.

故事從一雙玻璃鞋開始 最初  
灰姑娘還沒有回憶  
不懂小王子有多美麗

The story starts with a pair of glass slippers.

At first, Cinderella remembers nothing.

She cannot fathom the dazzling beauty

of the Little Prince.

直到伊甸園長出第一顆  
菩提 我們才學會孤寂  
在天鵝湖中邊走邊尋覓 尋覓

Only when Eden produces its first

bodhi tree do we master loneliness

in Swan Lake, going and seeking, seeking.

<sup>34</sup> Erni 2004: 18, Barmé 1999:128, Ho 2000:346.

<sup>35</sup> Erni 2004:20-21.

Images of the lake with Wong sitting on the bow of the boat and the medieval-ish house with dinner table, mirrors and an empty birdcage, are complemented by a third string of images. During the first verse, the clip introduces two puppets with blond curls in a doll's house resembling those of seventeenth-century European aristocrats. Later we see them dancing with masks in their string-controlled hands, as if at a masquerade ball. Finally Wong, sitting at the dinner table, has one of the puppets in her hands, operating the strings.

最後每個人都有個結局 只是  
踏破了玻璃鞋之後  
你的小王子跑到哪裡  
蝴蝶的玫瑰可能依然留  
在幾億年前的寒武紀  
怕鏡花水月  
終於來不及  
去相遇

At last, everyone has an endgame. But,  
after the glass slippers are broken,  
where does your Little Prince run to?

The butterfly's rose may still remain  
in Cambrian Times, myriad years ago.  
Perhaps – flowers in a mirror, the moon in the water –  
in the end there won't be enough time  
to meet.

The clip ends with Wong looking out of the window of the house, presumably over the lake. All the images – the lake, the house and the puppets – seem to spill into each other.

CAMBRIAN TIMES 寒武記 is the first of a series of five songs that trace a romance; they were published together in *Fable* 寓言 (2000OCT).<sup>36</sup> CAMBRIAN TIMES sets the scene, while NEW TENANT 新房客 recounts the meeting of the two lovers. CHANEL's 香奈兒 mystification of English neologisms *mote'er* 模特兒 'model' and *anqili* 安琪裡 '(protection) angel' render the romance elusive, like a fragrance. The song doesn't recount an actual history, but provides a vague, widely applicable script. "So many glass slippers, they fit lots of people," sings Wong to the drum and bass beat, adding in a whisper: "there's no uniqueness."

ASURA 阿修羅 and FLOWER ON THE OTHER SHORE 彼岸花 recount the romance's inevitable failure. The lover transforms from a Little Prince, as in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's "romantic child story" (as the liner notes have it), to a glass-slipper-crushing *asura*, a Sanskrit term for a power-hungry demon. Both songs employ Buddhist expressions to illustrate that reality is an illusion, emotions temporal, and time cyclic. From FLOWER ON THE OTHER SHORE:

看見的 熄滅了  
消失的 記住了  
我站在 海角天涯  
聽見 土壤萌芽

What I've seen has passed.  
What has disappeared I remember.  
I stand at the end of the world,  
hear the soil germinate,

<sup>36</sup> Wong is credited for the music and Lam Chik for the lyrics. Zhang Yadong is the producer of these five songs. The clip is by Wang Yuelun.

等待 曇花再開  
 把芬芳 留給年年  
 彼岸 沒有燈塔  
 我依然 張望著  
 天黑 刷白了頭髮  
 緊握著 我火把  
 他來 我對自己說  
 我不害怕 我很愛他

wait for the cloud-flower to bloom again,<sup>37</sup>  
 leaving fragrance for the years.  
 On the other shore are no lighthouses  
 I wait and watch,  
 the sky black, my hair gone white,  
 holding my torch high.  
 He arrives. I tell myself,  
 ‘I’m not afraid, I love him so.’

This sequence’s ambiguous amalgam of references to Eden, *Cinderella*, *The Little Prince*, Ozu Yasujiro’s films and Buddhism creates a romance that feels timeless and placeless, but also modern and Chinese. Lee Tain-Dow and Huang Yingfen write:

In the construction of ‘China-as-music,’ it is only harmful for the circulation of goods to be too politically exact.<sup>38</sup>

### De-sinicizing

The otherworldly amalgam of *Fable* has traceable connections with our world, in which Faye Wong was born on August 8<sup>th</sup> 1969 in Beijing. During the Cultural Revolution her father was purged and she temporarily assumed the family name of her mother, who is a soprano singer. In the early 1980s, she sang in CCTV’s Milky Way children’s choir and later recorded Teresa Teng covers. Then, in 1987, the family moved to Hong Kong, where she was introduced to the vocal trainer Dai Sicong. Dai Sicong eventually helped her to secure a contract with Cinepoly, and together Dai Sicong and Cinepoly remodeled Wong by improving her Cantonese, her singing techniques and her appearance. They also changed her Chinese name to Wong Ching Man and her English name to Shirley Wong. As Anthony Fung and Michael Curtin write in “De-sinicizing an aspiring Cantopop star”, part of their joint article on Faye Wong:

During the late 1980s and early 1990s mainland Chinese singers were stigmatized by Cantopop industry executives and music consumers as lacking the fashionable and cosmopolitan qualities of their Hong Kong counterparts. Faye’s first album, ‘Wong Ching Man’ (1989), sold well, but the singer was nevertheless criticized for coming across as too much of a bumpkin – that is, as a mainlander in need of refinement. ... Faye’s cultural capital with Hong Kong audiences – the epicenter of the Chinese pop music industry at that time – was crucially reliant on erasing traces of a past that might, in the minds of listeners, evoke allusions to mainland politics or to the social realities of that developing country.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Broad-leaved epiphyllum (epiphyllum oxypetalum), compare 曇花一現 ‘last briefly.’

<sup>38</sup> Lee 2002:111.

<sup>39</sup> Fung and Curtin 2002:267-268, compare also Huang 2005:57.

In the accounts of Huang Xiaoyang and others, Wong's stay in New York between late 1991 and Chinese New Year 1992 was a crucial transition point in her career.<sup>40</sup> When she returned to Hong Kong, she recorded her breakthrough album and released the hit *EASILY HURT WOMEN* 容易受傷的女人, a cover of the Japanese singer Nakajima Miyuki. The album had an English title, *Coming Home* (Faye 1992AUG), and made use of soul singing techniques, R&B rhythms and English words.<sup>41</sup>

Faye Wong's trip to New York also marked a break with her previous management. Upon her return to Hong Kong, she began working with Katie Chan, who helped her to gain more control over her sound and image. It was at this point that Wong changed her Chinese name back to Wang Fei and adopted 'Faye Wong' as her English stage name. In addition, she no longer downplayed her PRC identity, but recorded more and more songs in Mandarin. Her contacts with the Beijing rock scene, well covered by the Hong Kong paparazzi, also influenced this development, which also includes introducing Chinese audiences to musical styles and vocal techniques inspired by American rhythm and blues and soul, and later by Tori Amos and the Cranberries.

## From Cantonese to Mandarin

If we leave aside a number of theme songs for TV series and films, live registrations and songs related to charity or other events, Faye Wong recorded nineteen full-length albums and six EPs or maxi-singles between 1989 and 2005. Of all the tracks on the studio albums, a little over half are in Cantonese, a few are in English and Japanese, and the rest are in Mandarin. The changes in Wong's linguistic preferences can be divided into four periods.

Between 1989 and 1994, Wong is an aspiring cantopop star of the Hong Kong company Cinepoly. We rarely find Mandarin versions of Cantonese or English songs.<sup>42</sup> However, fans and critics treat these sporadic Mandarin songs, rather than her Cantonese songs, as reflecting Wong's intentions.

The second period runs from 1994, when Cinepoly published Wong's first Mandarin album, to her last Cantonese EP in 1997. The Cantonese album *Random Thinking* 胡思乱想 (1994NOV) marks her musical emancipation, whereas her mandapop of the same period is rather conservative. By contrast, Wong's last Mandarin album of this period is very experimental. *Impatience* 浮躁 (1996JULY) contains no love songs, Wong of-

<sup>40</sup> Huang 2005:60-70.

<sup>41</sup> Fung and Curtin date *EASILY HURT WOMAN* to 1991, prior to Wong's 'journey to the west' (she allegedly converted to Buddhism in New York). In their account, Wong's stay in America still functions as a transition, but a transition to her self-awareness and her musical experiments of 1994 (Fung and Curtin 2000:271-272).

<sup>42</sup> *No Regrets* 执迷不悔 (1993FEB) opens with a Cantonese version of the title song; the Mandarin version seems to have been added as an afterthought. *A Hundred Thousand Whys* 十萬個為什麼 (1993SEPT) contains two Mandarin tracks of which Wong has not recorded Cantonese versions, *THINK* 動心 and *SEDUCE ME* 誘惑我.

ten sings or hums wordlessly, and three tracks are instrumental.<sup>43</sup>

In 1997 Wong signs a contract with EMI, explicitly stating that she does not want to record Cantonese albums. The situation of the first period is reversed: this period features mainly Mandarin albums, with Cantonese versions of Mandarin songs added as an appendix.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, Wong's mandapop albums in 2001 and 2003, the latter year with Sony Taiwan, also contain only a few original Cantonese tracks, next to Cantonese covers of Mandarin songs.<sup>45</sup>

Of the 237 songs included, 123 are in Cantonese, 109 are in Mandarin, 3 are in English and 2 are in Japanese. Musically, there seems to be no systematic difference between Wong's Cantonese and Mandarin songs, further suggesting the interconnectedness of these markets. Fifteen songs have versions in multiple languages. Most of the time, the lyrics of the different versions are only loosely related. The musical accompaniment of thirteen of these songs is exactly the same. There are two Cantonese tracks on *Scenic Tour* 唱游 (1998OCT) that are covers of Mandarin songs on the album but have original orchestration. However, the differences between these versions are not consistent.<sup>46</sup> Com-

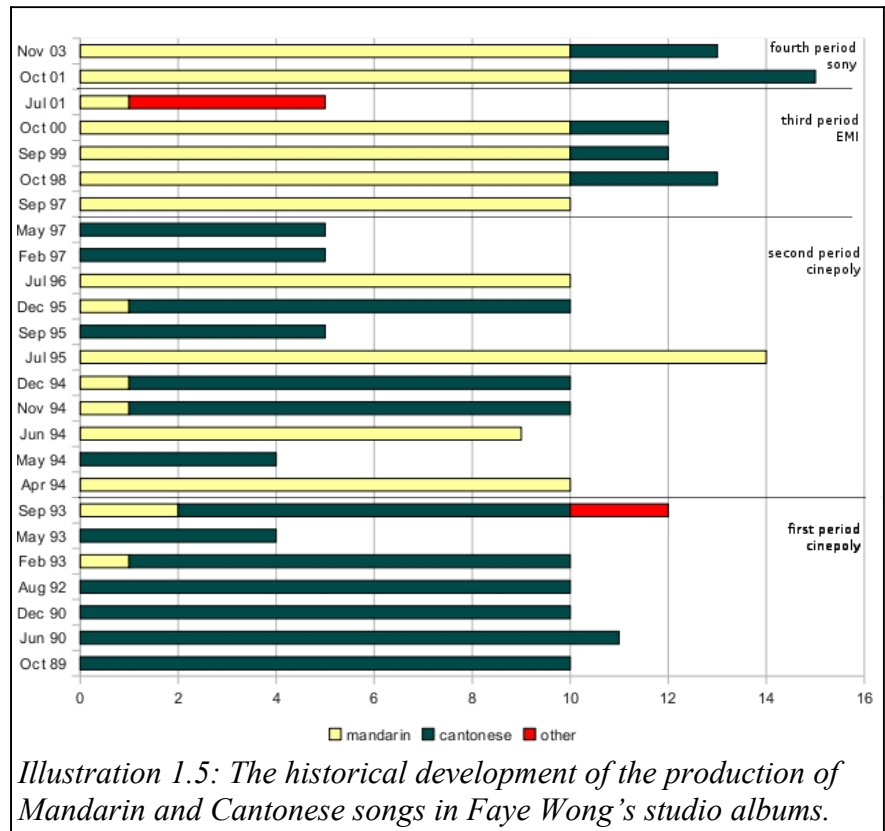


Illustration 1.5: The historical development of the production of Mandarin and Cantonese songs in Faye Wong's studio albums.

<sup>43</sup> Of the four Mandarin albums of this period, the first two (Faye 1994APR and Faye 1994JUNE), were quite soft and conservative. Although most of the material was original, they also contained cover versions of American and Irish songs that Wong had previously covered on Cantonese albums (but no covers of other Cantonese songs). The three Cantonese CDs of this period all contain one original Mandarin track, such as the autobiographical EXIT 出路 on *Ingratiate Yourself* 討好自己 (1994DEC:05) (Fung and Curtin 2002:282), and OATH 誓言 (1994NOV:02), the cantopop album that marks Faye Wong's musical emancipation. In 1995 Faye Wong recorded *Decadent Sound* 靡靡之音, a Mandarin album with covers of her childhood idol Teresa Teng.

<sup>44</sup> Wong's first EMI album (1997OCT) does not contain any Cantonese songs, but the albums of 1998, 1999 and 2000 each include two or three Cantonese versions of Mandarin songs as an appendix at the end of the album or on a bonus CD (Faye 1998OCT:11,12,13; 1999SEPT:11,12; 2000OCT:11,12).

<sup>45</sup> Faye 2001OCT:11,12,13; 2003NOV:11; Faye 2001OCT:14,15; 2003NOV:12,13.

<sup>46</sup> The Cantonese FORGIVING MYSELF 原諒自己 (Faye 1998OCT:11) with acoustic guitar picking, background percussion and flute is by and large the acoustic or intimate version of the Mandarin ABANDONED HALFWAY 半途而廢 (Faye 1998OCT:04), with its arrangement of electric guitars, drums and keyboard generated violins. With the Cantonese COMMANDMENT AGAINST ROMANCE 情誠 (Faye 1998OCT:13) and the Mandarin COMMANDMENT AGAINST SEX 色誠 (Faye 1998OCT:03) the situation is reversed: despite the added sound

paring entire albums, the differences reflect the changing sound of the times. Possibly research that considers more singers will reveal something quite different, but in the case of Faye Wong I cannot point out any difference between Mandarin and Cantonese songs that relates to their languages per se. Nevertheless, Faye Wong has actively contributed to the shift from Cantonese to Mandarin as the main language of Chinese popular music.

Finally, despite the ‘so-whatness’ of much of Wong’s sound, her participation in the Hong Kong handover ceremony makes her allegiance to Beijing explicit. On the



*Illustration 1.6: Faye Wong at the Hong Kong handover ceremony. The lyrics read “The pearl of the Orient shines on me.”*

evening of June 30<sup>th</sup> 1997 three Mandarin songs sung by Faye Wong and Sally Yeh were televised as a prelude to the official ceremony.<sup>47</sup> First, Sally Yeh sang KEEPING THE ROOT, then Wong sang LAKE HONGHU’S WATER, WAVE AFTER WAVE 洪湖水,浪打浪. This was the theme song from the Revolutionary opera *The Red Guards of Lake Honghu* 洪湖赤衛隊 (1959), with lines like “the loving kindness 恩情 of the Communist Party is deeper than the Eastern Sea.” Finally they sang TOMORROW WILL BE BETTER 明天會更好 with a children’s choir.<sup>48</sup> Wong also participated in the live concerts celebrating the handover, in both Hong Kong and Beijing, performing the EULOGY OF RETURN 回歸頌 together with Sally Yeh, George Lam and the ‘Four Heavenly Kings.’<sup>49</sup>

## Teresa Teng, Jay Chou and Neoclassicisms

Faye Wong signifies a shift towards Mandarin and the PRC market in Chinese popular music. Simultaneously, her sound and lyrics are cosmopolitan, and perhaps even escapist and placeless. This ambiguity is even more salient in the use of classical Chinese poetry as lyrics for pop songs. On the one hand, references in classical Chinese to ancient dynasties signify pride in a unified and shared Chinese tradition. Simultaneously, however, these songs use archaic language, ancient tropes (lamenting the passing of time) and timeless narratives (fairytales) to present the unattainable, mythical and otherworldly.

Since the advent of popular music, its sung language has been influenced by the blend of written and spoken language in operatic traditions such as Peking and Canton Opera. Mandapop, for instance, inherits the pronunciation of *de* 的 as *di* and *le* 了 as *liao*. Besides these structural features and the continuous production of theme songs for soap series set in Imperial China, there have been three moments when the influence of classical poetry on contemporary lyrics became more pronounced: 1980s Taiwan nostalgic pop, early 1990s Beijing rock, and early 2000s Taiwan Chinese Wind.

effects (tremolo, most notably), it is the Mandarin version that sounds more acoustic and intimate.

<sup>47</sup> Yu 2005:49, Yu 2001:5-7.

<sup>48</sup> Yu 2005:49.

<sup>49</sup> Witzleben 2002.

The theme song of the 1980 soap series based on Chiong Yao's *On the Other Side of the Water* 在水一方 (1975) foregrounds the inaccessibility and otherworldliness of the past and connects it to impossible romance. "There is a beauty, on the other side of the water" goes the chorus of this adaptation from the millennia-old *Book of Songs* 詩經. Teresa Teng famously covered it. Moreover, in 1983 Teng recorded the album *Faded Feelings* 淡淡幽情, consisting entirely of Tang and Song dynasty poems set to pop music. SO LET US FOR A LONG TIME... 但願人長久 is a rendition of a poem written by Su Shi in 1076, of which Faye Wong also included a version on *Decadent Sound* 靡靡之音, her Teresa Teng cover album (Faye 1995JULY).<sup>50</sup> Teng's renditions of classical poetry, and later Delphine Tsai's in *Yang Guifei* 楊貴妃 (1986), develop a romantic and nostalgic strand that is informed by both costume dramas and Campus Song's renewed interest in Chinese folk and traditional culture. SO LET US FOR A LONG TIME... was composed by Campus singer Liang Hong-chi.

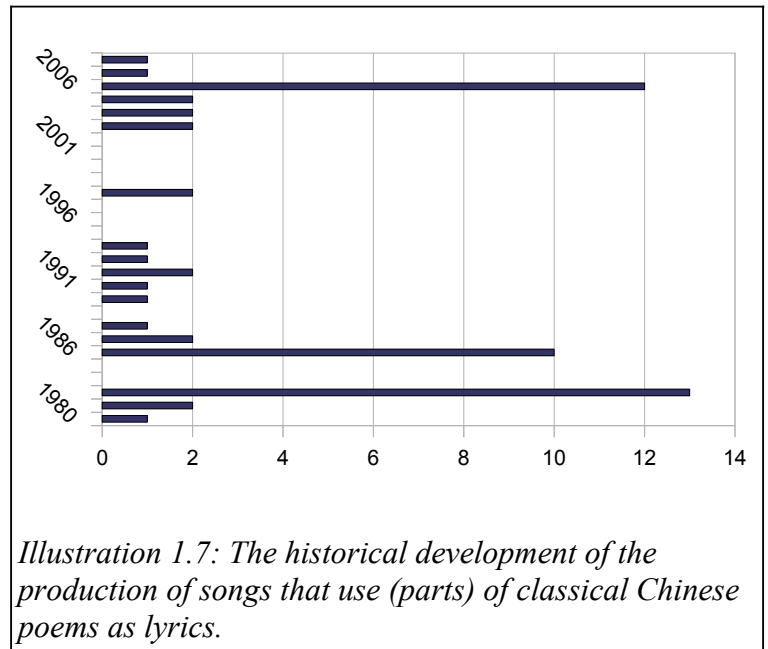
Already in 1982 Lo Ta-yu famously parodied the archaic words and nostalgia of Campus Song in *Pedantry* 之乎者也:

風花雪月之 嘩啦啦啦乎 ye wind flowers snow and moon wa la la la yeah  
所謂民歌者 是否如是也 so-called folk singers isn't that all they do

Displacing the folk sound of Campus Song with a more militant rock sound, Lo became a successful regional and international pop star. He also influenced the Beijing rock bands that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I will discuss their use of classical poetry in the next section.

In Taiwan and Hong Kong, only a few songs with classical Chinese lyrics were recorded in the 1990s. STILL, THE SOUND OF WAVES 濤聲依舊, which quotes parts of the Tang dynasty poet Zhang Xu's NIGHTLY ANCHORING AT MAPLE BRIDGE 楓橋夜泊, became PRC singer Mao Ning's signature song after he performed it in the 1993 CCTV New Year Gala.<sup>51</sup>

In 2001 the Taiwanese pop star Jay Chou made it big with the Chinese Wind 中國風. Chou broke through in 2000 with a combination of romantic R&B ballads and tough hip-hop tracks.



<sup>50</sup> Liu 1990:350 cites a translation by Eugene Eoyang, and Xu 1982:90-93 offers the original next to an English translation.

<sup>51</sup> Wang 2007:251.

His second album, *Fantasy* 范特西 (2001), consolidated his prominence, selling five million legal units in Taiwan and Hong Kong alone. Their lyrics, music and video clips referred nostalgically to 1930s Shanghai and (more comic-book-like) to Japanese ninjas and Chinese martial arts. Chou developed this further in *Eight Dimensions* 八度空間 (2002), and especially in the song *DRAGON FIST* 龍拳 (see Chapter 3). Chou's subsequent albums contained two or three songs in this style, but Chineseness featured disproportionately in their visual imagery and album reviews. Other singers followed suit, most notably S.H.E. with *CONSTANT YEARNING* 長相思 (2003) and *CHINESE* 中國話 (2007); Tank on all his albums; and Wang Leehom with what he calls his “chinked-out” style on *Shangri-la* 心中的日月 (2004) and *Heroes of Earth* 蓋世英雄 (2005). I quote Chou and Wang's album titles because they already indicate an effort to provide access to a fantastic ‘other world.’ At the same time, the Chinese Wind asserted (PRC-centered) Greater China and eased access to state-owned media and venues in the PRC.<sup>52</sup>

Both the music and the lyrics of the Chinese Wind are hybrids of China and the West, and of the old and the new. Musically, the Chinese Wind employs instruments such as the *erhu* (fiddle), the *guzheng* (zither), the *yangqin* (dulcimer), and various flutes. Melodies from folksongs and opera sometimes appear in intros and a few tracks are pentatonic, but on the whole, Western-introduced harmony and song structures prevail. In terms of lyrics, Chou's lyricist Vincent Fang explores ‘traditional’ themes such as martial arts, antique furniture, calligraphy, porcelain, medicine, and historical events and persons. The lyrics contain ancient sayings, archaic-sounding neologisms and sometimes quotations from classical poetry. For instance, the lyrics of *EAST WIND BREAKS* 東風破 (2003) explicitly refer to Su Shi's poetry – although, in contrast to what some accounts suggest, the lyrics are not actually from a Song dynasty poem.<sup>53</sup> Jay Chou has assertive, patriotic songs such as *DRAGON FIST* and *HERBALIST COMPENDIUM* 本草綱目 (2006), but he also has ballads, such as *EAST WIND BREAKS* and *BLUE WHITE PORCELAIN* 青花瓷 (2007). Like *ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WATER*, these ballads deliberately confuse the past with a distant lover.

## A-mei between Taiwan and the PRC

The current domination of Chinese popular music by Taiwanese pop stars is a consequence of their appeal to the PRC and Greater China markets. However, like Hong Kong singers around 1989, Taiwanese artists may feel ambivalent towards both the PRC and Chineseness. Since martial law was lifted in Taiwan in 1987, the automatic hegemony of Mandarin, Taipei and the Nationalist Party (KMT) has gradually eased, and songs in Taiwanese and Hakka and in aboriginal languages have slowly gained recognition. Consequently, musicians and researchers have protested against categorizing Taiwanese popular music as Chinese popular music, or even as a branch of Chinese popular music. They cite Taiwan's uniqueness, as well as comparably strong Japanese, Austronesian and

<sup>52</sup> Fung 2007.

<sup>53</sup> The title of the song, *Dong feng po*, plays on Su Shi's pen name, *dong po* 東坡 ‘[hermit of the] eastern slope.’

Asian connections.<sup>54</sup> This subsection looks at the tumultuous career of A-mei to explore Taiwan's renegotiation of its cultural ties with China.

The stage name 'A-mei' (written from the start in the Latin alphabet) is an intimate abbreviation of the singer's full Mandarin name Chang Hui-mei. In her Puyuma language, A-mei is called Gulilai Amit and nicknamed Katsu.<sup>55</sup> A-mei's debut *Sisters* 姐妹 (1996) and the subsequent *Bad Boy* (1997) contain musical references to this aboriginal background, but don't hinge on it. The albums bring ballads with difficult high melodies and upbeat dance songs with spicy lyrics. Her eighth Mandarin album, *Can I Hug You? My Love* 我能抱你吗? 我的爱人 (1999), was the high point of A-mei's career, selling eight million legal units across Asia.

On May 20<sup>th</sup> 2000, the pro-Taiwanese independence politician Chen Shui-bian was inaugurated as the first non-KMT Taiwanese president. At the ceremony, A-mei sang the anthem of the Republic of China, as Taiwan is officially called. Subsequently, the PRC banned A-mei from radio and television, and Coca-Cola dropped her from their multi-million dollar advertising campaign.<sup>56</sup>

A-mei refrained from making any direct comment. Six months later, she released *Regardless* 不顧一切 (2000), which reiterated her commitment to the happiness of all peoples. However, this proved insufficient. In June 2004, on a promotional tour for China's leading brand of instant noodles, A-mei was able to give a performance in Shanghai, but met with Internet-organised protests against Taiwanese independence in Qingdao and had to cancel her show in Hangzhou.<sup>57</sup> In the Taiwanese press, Vice-President Annette Lu commented:

[the PRC and Taiwan] have entered a state of war ... when the two sides [of the Taiwan strait] are shooting at each other, should Chang Hui-Mei go to Beijing, or should she help defend the security of her 23 million compatriots?<sup>58</sup>

This further fueled the debate. An article on the CCP-aligned *People's Web* 人民網 on August 12<sup>th</sup> accused "Taiwanese independence elements" of disrespecting A-mei's artistic freedom, sabotaging the Chinese Communist Party's good intentions and hurting the love of many PRC fans for Taiwanese pop stars.<sup>59</sup>

A month later, A-mei performed in Beijing for the celebration of the third anniversary of the successful Chinese bid for the Olympic Games of 2008. The TV interview she gave for CCTV's program *News Room* 新聞會客廳 on the eve of her show dealt mainly with her great happiness that "our bid for the Games succeeded." The incident in Hangzhou was mentioned only briefly:

<sup>54</sup> Conversation, Ho Dun-hung, Liverpool, July 2009.

<sup>55</sup> Liu 2007:48-73.

<sup>56</sup> Ho 2003:145.

<sup>57</sup> Wang 2004. Cf. Liu 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Yang 2004.

<sup>59</sup> Xu 2004.

Host: “Did you understand the emotional state 情緒 of the netizens?”

A-mei: “Yes, I had to. Because you have to understand why everybody got into this emotional state. ... In fact, I really understood, so I made myself shut up, not a word. Everyone has their own emotions to give vent to. Once relieved, people might see things differently. I thought it would be better to try to make people understand later. ... I had to face it, and could not continue with that kind of mentality. Anyway, it’s not my decision, it isn’t any of my business, it isn’t my concern, I thought, I should face it.”<sup>60</sup>

This was widely interpreted as a sign of repentance, which did not go down well in Taiwan. Questions were asked in the Legislative Yuan:

Singers and businessmen should have national awareness. Furthermore, A-mei said she’s incapable of entering the world of grown-ups. Well, is a person of thirty still a child?<sup>61</sup>

On her next album, *Maybe Tomorrow* 也許明天 (2004), A-mei avoided the issue. Only at the very end of the three episodes of the prime-time CCTV interview program *Lu Yi’s Appointment* 魯豫有約, which were devoted to A-mei in April 2006, did she refer indirectly to the issue by singing CHINESE GIRL from *I Want Happiness?* 我要快樂? (2006). By using English, the chorus avoids specifying Chineseness:

你是個最愛自己的Chinese Girl     you are the Chinese girl that loves herself most  
GOGOGO 跨越所有太憂郁的路口     go go go jump over all those gloomy crossroads

Despite this deliberate naiveté, the question mark at the end of the album title suggests A-mei’s development to a more mature sound-image-text. *Amit* 阿密特 (2009) starts with a syncopated metal riff on distorted guitars supported by heavy drums and a double bass, after which A-mei sings: “Moonlight’s just moonlight, not any frost on the ground” 那是個月亮就是個月亮並不是地上霜, an allusion to China’s most famous poem, Li Bai’s THOUGHTS ON A QUIET NIGHT 清夜思 (726). The lyrics, by the Hong Kong heavyweight Lam Chik, continue to ridicule the sentimentality of classical Chinese poetry. The line “whoever said ‘Don’t lean on the railing alone’ – moron” 誰曾說獨自莫憑欄, 笨蛋 dismisses classical poet Li Yu (937-978).

Contrary to what the opening song TO THE POINT 開門見山 might suggest, the album as a whole highlights the complicated and multifaceted identity of A-mei, and by extension that of contemporary Taiwan. The album design and the video clips juxtapose a gothic A-mei in black leather with a version of her with red hair and clad in immaculate

<sup>60</sup> Sun 2004.

<sup>61</sup> Liu 2007:175.

white. In addition, a song written in Taiwanese by Adia, the album's producer, is performed with double-reed shawms (suonas) in the background, while Puyuma folksongs are included in the title song and the outro of *WEIGHT OF THE SOUL* 靈魂的重量. All of these are elements that connect *Amit* to the recently emerged *taike* rock. *Taie* rock 台客搖滾, appealing to Hakka, Taiwanese (Hoklo) and various aboriginal groups,<sup>62</sup> promotes a Taiwanese music scene outside Mandarin-dominated Taipei. *WEIGHT OF THE SOUL* quotes the phrase and melody Ho-Hai-Yan, which has come to stand for aboriginal identity through the Puyuma folk singer Pau-dull's 1999 album of that name and through the Hohaiyan Rock Festival, which has been held yearly since 2000. 43 Chang, one of the founders of the festival, explains the term, which originates from the Amis:

The aborigines of Taiwan have a legend from the days before written records. One day, the ancients discovered the sea, but they weren't sure how to name it, and pointing their ears to the water, they listened as the waves rolled onto shore. A melody emerged "Ho-Hai-Yan." From that day on, the word "Ho-Hai-Yan" has signified waves and the ocean to aboriginal people.<sup>63</sup>

But the album's sound is also reminiscent of the successful Japanese-inspired Taiwanese band F.I.R.. Finally, *SPLIT / LIFE* 分／生 not only exemplifies A-mei's shift away from sunny happiness, but also makes her multiple identity explicit:

我不確定	幾個我	住在心裡面	I can't decide	how many me's	live inside me.
偶爾像敵人	偶爾像姐妹		Sometimes enemies,	sometimes sisters.	
分裂前的熱淚	分裂後的冷眼		Hot tears before the split,	cold looks afterwards.	

<sup>62</sup> Ho 2009.

<sup>63</sup> Hohaiyan 2010.

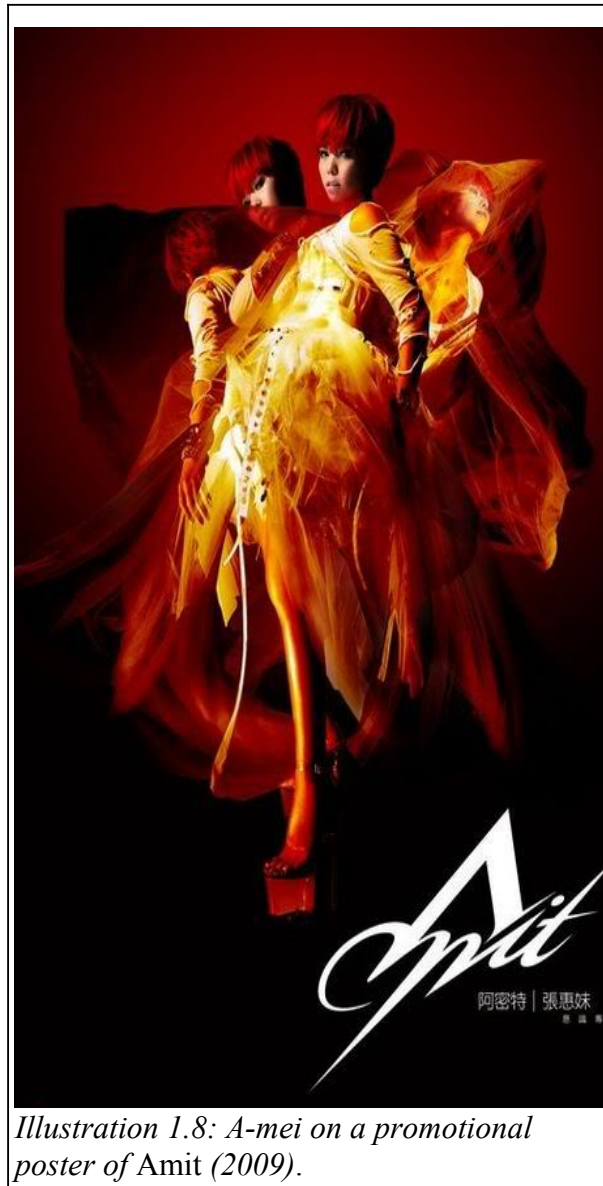


Illustration 1.8: A-mei on a promotional poster of *Amit* (2009).

越愛誰 越防備	Intense love breeds caution,
像隻脆弱的刺蝟	like a hedgehog, twice-shy.
分裂中的心碎 分裂後的假面	Heartbreak during the split, masks afterwards.
不快樂 不傷悲	Not happy, not hurt.
情緒埋藏成了地雷	Buried feelings become a landmine
等待爆裂	waiting to explode.

### §3 Nationalizing Rock

Where the previous section focused on the regional, and thus traced connections across various Asian states, this section centers on the sinification of rock within the boundaries of the state. The sinification of rock may be defined as a sustained attempt within the PRC (with occasional reverberations beyond its borders) to create rock music that boosts the prestige of China as a nation centered around Beijing.

Just as Li Jinhui's music did in Shanghai in the 1930s, the sinification of rock in the 1980s presents a solution to the dilemma of becoming both modern and Chinese. In abstracto, this dilemma of modernity is a conflict between the universality of civilization, suggesting the lossless translatability of nationhood and rock on the one hand, and the particularity and uniqueness of languages, geographical locations, cultural habits, historical developments and so on, on the other. This dilemma is irresolvable and can also be identified in other places, such as present-day Europe. It is most pressing when states are modernizing and nations are being built or redefined, as Germany was in the nineteenth century and the post-Mao PRC is today.

The sinification of rock started in the 1980s with the Northwest Wind and Cui Jian, continued in the 1990s with Tang Dynasty and later the Master Says, and led up to Second Hand Rose and a host of bands in the 2000s. In this section I outline this lineage and consider how Chinese critics have highlighted the tension between Chinese culture and this USA-defined type of music.

#### Neoclassicism in Beijing Rock

The Beijing rock band Again adapted the poem THINKING OF THE PAST AT BEIGU PAVILION IN JINGKOU 京口北固亭懷古, by the Song-dynasty poet Xin Qiji, under the title THE BEACON FIRES THAT BLAZED THE WAY TO YANGZHOU 烽火揚州路 on the sampler *Rock Beijing* 搖滾北京 (1993).<sup>64</sup> Tang Dynasty's eponymous album (1992) similarly appealed to martial arts narratives and patriotism. Baranovitch argues for the interpretation of these dreams in a national frame:

Like "The Beacon Fires that Blazed the Way to Yangzhou," "Returning in Dream to the Tang Dynasty" [梦回唐朝] is inspired by the style of classical poetry, and it even cites a line from a poem by the famous Tang Dynasty poet Du Fu, who

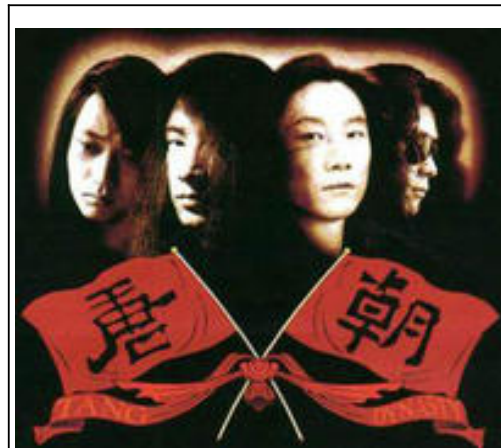
<sup>64</sup> Baranovitch 2003:261-264.

like Xin Qiji wrote many nationalistic poems. Like *Lunhui/Again*, Tang Dynasty articulates its ties to tradition also through music when, toward the end of “Returning in Dream to the Tang Dynasty,” they temporarily deviate from the Western heavy-metal style that dominates the song to recite two lines in the traditional recitative style of Beijing opera. Music is used to express Chineseness also at the very beginning of “Returning in Dream to the Tang Dynasty”; the prelude to the song, which opens the album, includes effects that remind one of the sound of harmonics [i.e. flageolets or overtones] played on the ancient Chinese seven-string zither (*guqin*). The band’s use of gongs enhances the national flavor, as does the powerful playing of barrel drums.<sup>65</sup>

Tang Dynasty’s popularity among PRC rockers and their pride in the Chinese heritage are well researched.<sup>66</sup> In the eyes of most Western observers Tang Dynasty have perhaps succeeded too well in making their music sound Chinese, venturing into self-Orientalism and nationalism. Baranovitch’s section “The Limits of Resistance: Rockers’ Unity with the State and the Mainstream,” from which the quotation above is taken, portrays Tang Dynasty as pro- CCP. Jeroen de Kloet also mentions the role of the American-born Chinese Kaiser Kuo, one of the founders of Tang Dynasty. Kuo left the band and later returned, which, De Kloet argues:

was severely criticized by other rock musicians. Whereas Zhang Ju [the former bass guitarist who died in a motorcycle crash] played the guitar in a Chinese way, Kaiser is said to play it in an American way, which is unsuitable for Chinese rock. Besides, he is said to be a bad guitar player anyway.<sup>67</sup>

Kaiser left Tang Dynasty again in 1999 over quarrels concerning anti-USA sentiments in the wake of NATO’s bombing of the PRC embassy in Belgrade.<sup>68</sup> It remains unclear what “playing the guitar in a Chinese way” means. I cannot pinpoint it on Tang Dynasty’s albums. As De Kloet argues, these remarks rather show the importance of ideological convictions. The inclusion of an American-born Chinese complicates Tang Dynasty’s quest for sinified rock.



*Illustration 1.9: Cover of Tang Dynasty's eponymous debut album (1992).*

<sup>65</sup> Baranovitch 2003:264.

<sup>66</sup> Heberer 1994:140-147, Steen 1996:164-175, Huot 2000, Wong 2005, Wang 2007: 194-213, 242-244, De Kloet 2010:54-60.

<sup>67</sup> De Kloet 2001:69, 2010: 58-59.

<sup>68</sup> De Kloet 2001:66-70, Cf. Schwankert 1999. Haun Saussy relates the NATO bombing to a widespread discontent over ‘the West’ among Chinese intellectuals (Saussy 2001:140).

## Promoting Sinification

In 1992 Huang Liaoyuan co-authored the two-volume *Overview of World Rock* 世界搖滾樂大觀 and in 1996 he published a compilation of Chinese pop and rock criticism under the title *Ten Years: A Record of Chinese Popular Music 1986-1996* 十年：1986~1996中國流行音樂紀史, through his own company Han Tang. Huang Liaoyuan also managed the Beijing folk singer Ai Jing at the record company Great Earth, and later Tang Dynasty at his own company. Finally, Huang organized festivals that introduced the predominantly Beijing-based rock scene to wider audiences, such as Glorious '94 輝煌'94 and Radiant Road of Chinese Rock 中國搖滾的光輝道路 (2004).

*Ten Years* includes a republication of “Colonialist Trends on the Chinese Popular Music Scene” 中國流行樂壇的殖民主義傾向, which I quote almost in full:

These years [the early 1990s], the listening habits of the Chinese people 中國人 have been in close step with the West. Producers, singers and audiences invariably discuss Euro-America or the Euro-American-enveloped 籠罩 *gangtai*. Our souls and ears seem to have fundamentally changed into humble followers of our Western master's wishes.

Euro-America, in respect to popular music, *is* very developed, but it also has a degenerate 沒落 side. Why are so many people only interested in such cheap popular signboards as Michael Jackson, Madonna and Michael Bolton, while they ignore Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and other Western sounds that awakened the People? When Roxette came to this mighty city Beijing [in February 1995], lots of people from the entertainment business cried on each other's shoulders, saying: “What can we do? We can't surpass this in a lifetime.” How pitiful!<sup>69</sup>

Huang Liaoyuan criticizes the Chinese popular music scene for slavishly copying the wrong kind of Western music. He doesn't say that modernization should be abandoned, but advocates combining the best of both worlds. As such, Huang's analysis resonates in both language and ideas with China's first attempts at modernization in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Chinese popular music scene, just like the Chinese cultural world and other trades, has manifested the broadmindedness of the Chinese people in receiving foreign culture. Rivers flow into the sea. But starting from a certain moment, these wide-open arms became obedient cartilage, positioning the robust torso of full Westernization in antithesis to narrow racism. Before long, those few guides that learned foreign 洋文 music started promoting the Occident's jade over the Orient's tiles all over the place. “Non-mainstream” and “alternative” became flags that fluttered against the wind. Those that entertain foreigners 走洋穴, hang out

<sup>69</sup> Huang 1996:240. Cf. Huang 2002:19-21.

with embassy personnel and Western journalists all day, and are blessed with the so-called gift of Western progressive thought – each of them uses the West's backward aesthetics as a yardstick to enter into a cruel shaming and destroying of the concepts of sonority 音响 that the Chinese have. A small group of them even teams up with outside forces, to abuse and slander ethnic and folk music... That's the reality of the Chinese popular music scene.<sup>70</sup>

In the following and final paragraph, Huang asks for the “always progressive rock spirit” as an antidote against “the simple copy that aids colonization.”

However, in an interview in 2003 he openly doubted the translatability of rock:

There are lots of new bands, I often go to their shows. Under the present circumstances, most of the bands like [Zuoxiao] Zuzhou, Tongue and The Master Says have a hard time. They have few shows and fewer fans. And I personally don't really like the newly emerged [mainstream] bands, especially those that have started performing PRC-wide. So, at the moment there should be a group of rockers that persist in the underground, persevering to the point that they eat dry bread and drink plain water. This kind of spirit is extremely good and understandable. But, for now, we absolutely cannot see what kind of use they are to Chinese 中國 rock music. Because of what I just said, for many years into the future there will not be too much of a market.

As for musical form [of Chinese rock], I think the necessary spice – either rhythm or melody – is purely borrowed, so there is not a lot of comparison possible [between Chinese and Western rock]. The character of the Chinese differs from that of Westerners. Westerners live in extremes, sometimes extremely happy, sometimes extremely sad. Comparatively, Chinese adhere to the golden mean 中庸. While Westerners are quite uncomplicated 單純, Chinese rather take a comprehensive 周全 [attitude]. So, the soil is different, and so is the development.

[In the course of the development since the 1980s, Chinese rockers] traded their rage for peacefulness, arriving at thorough commercialization. Chinese rock completed this metamorphosis, and basically also its historical mission. I feel that a generation has come to pass, that is to say, not only this rock music has come to an end, but also those things of that generation. ... Later, others will pick up the thread of this new Long March, but the outcome is uncertain. I have completely run out of predictions on Chinese rock, but I'm a rock fan, so I hope they'll fare well.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Huang 1996:240.

<sup>71</sup> Lu 2003:342-344.

Huang Liaoyuan's reaction is fairly representative among intellectuals of his generation, who view Chinese rock music as a movement with a historical mission. To them, it should respond to China's socio-political and cultural reality, which is concentrated at the state or national level.<sup>72</sup> However, most new bands of the late 1990s stressed connections with the international punk, new metal and Britpop scenes, rather than Chineseness.<sup>73</sup> Hence, Huang dismisses them as copies of commercial music. Bands that Huang perceives as being part of this mission, on the other hand, do not generate a large following or impact. As reasons for the bleak future for Chinese rock, Huang hints at profound cultural differences. Still, because rock seems to offer the only answer to the dominant position of Western mainstream pop and its South-Chinese agents, Huang persists in his opportunism by writing, managing and occasionally organizing commercially viable festivals.<sup>74</sup>

### Extremely China, Modern, Folk and Rock

In the course of the 1990s, sinification ceases to be a core occupation of Chinese rock in general and becomes the pursuit of a limited number of bands, one of which is The Master Says. The lyrics of The Master Says contain archaic proverbs, Beijing dialect and Buddhist sayings. The band name refers to Confucius. Their music and performance styles combine funk, Peking Opera and the Beijing tradition of comedic dialogues called cross-talk 相聲. Vocalist Qiu Ye's nasal delivery, Chinese percussion and the occasional Chinese flute (for instance, a vertical notched bamboo flute 簫 on THE WAY OF WINE 酒道) serve as additional markers of Chineseness, or even Beijingness. A review praises their debut *Volume One* 第一冊 (1996) as "extremely Chinese, extremely modern, extremely folk 民俗 and extremely rock."<sup>75</sup> *Volume Two* 第二冊 (2002) continues this lineage with songs such as VARIATIONS OF PLUM BLOSSOM 梅花弄, which refers to a traditional piece allegedly originating from the Eastern Jin Dynasty (265-420).<sup>76</sup>

The playfulness and humor of The Master Says contrast with the more serious metal sound of Tang Dynasty. LOST FOR WORDS 沒法兒說 of *Volume Two* abruptly juxtaposes a variety of musical and lyrical registers.

同志這個稱呼 已經不使了改成: “哈嘍、嗯哼” 哎這是啥味兒啊?

It's impossible to stop using 'comrade' and say "Ha-lo, er...", ay, what's that strange sound?

怎麼怎麼了民族文化? 嘛跟嘛要發揚光大嘛 靠的就是這些個人兒嗎?

<sup>72</sup> De Kloet 2010:18. Baranovitch 2003:138.

<sup>73</sup> De Kloet 2002:102-103.

<sup>74</sup> International Herald Leader 2004.

<sup>75</sup> Moderator 2006.

<sup>76</sup> The melody was known under different names: THREE VARIATIONS OF PLUM BLOSSOM 梅花三弄, PLUM BLOSSOM LEAD 梅花引, PLUM BLOSSOM TUNE 梅花曲 and FALLING PLUM BLOSSOMS 梅花落. More generally, since it blooms in winter, the plum blossom stands for sincerity in the face of injustice. Although The Master Says refer to this heritage, I have not been able to retrace musical or lyrical quotations.

What d'you mean national culture? Adding yo to yo to reach glorious heights, does all this rely on these few individuals?

它也難怪支書老是對俺說是做為中國人就應該有中國人的骨頭啊

Can't blame the Party Branch Secretary for insisting that to be Chinese you need Chinese bones.

叫俺吃的飽了穿的暖了 大嘴一抹小臉兒一紅嘛自然就想干點兒甚麼事兒

Telling y'all to eat our fill, dress warmly, as soon as that big mouth rubs and that small face reddens it spontaneously thinks of playing some kind of trick.

嘿！只要你肯前腿兒弓啊 後腿蹬啊、咱一准兒端著 跟你練練哈哈功！哈！

Hey! As long as your forelegs are bent and your hind legs pressed down, we'll surely and steady-handedly practice haha-techniques with you! Ha!

The refrain of *LOST FOR WORDS*, sung by a chorus, advocates loyalty to parents and local roots: "we must spread this place's smell with our bodies." The verses offer an account of the transformation of contemporary China with political connotations, which most likely is why only the refrain was printed in the liner notes. The refrain of *HUSH HUSH 乖乖的* offers a Cui Jian-style political allegory: it tells of a father who offers sweets to avoid difficult questions, which suggests the CCP offering economic prosperity to avoid political transformation.<sup>77</sup> Cui acknowledged kinship with The Master Says by not only producing, but also recording parts of their debut album himself, according to fellow musician Zuxiao Zuzhou.<sup>78</sup>

Like Cui Jian, The Master Says localize their sound also by referring to the CCP and the PRC's revolutionary history. In general, revolutionary imagery and sounds are pervasive in the rock scene. Cui Jian's trademark white cap with a red star and titles such as *Rock on the New Long March 新長征路上的搖滾* (1989) and *THE COUNTRYSIDE SURROUNDS THE CITY 農村保衛城市* (2005) are just a few of the most obvious references to Mao Zedong and his reign. The use of Communist slogans, vocabulary and sounds by Cui, The Master Says and others oscillate between praise and parody, and between the anti-traditional, foreign and/or international on the one hand and the nostalgic, indigenous and national on the other. This holds true across the board: from the 1992 sampler *Red Rock 紅色搖滾* with covers such as *SOCIALISM IS GOOD 社會主義好* to the 2006 noise remixes of Model Opera on *What is Modernity? Revolution? Model? 甚麼是現代? 革命? 樣板?*; from Tang Dynasty's metal version of *The Internationale* (1992) to the anti-CCP slogans of the radical band Punk God, which are paradoxically reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution. Finally, on *Do You Know Where the East Is 你知道東方在哪一邊* (2008), Zuxiao Zuzhou makes this strategy of sinification explicit by setting a speech of Jiang Zemin to music. Titled *ON METHODOLOGY 方法論* and written in 1998, it speaks of: "pushing the great project of establishing socialism with Chinese characteristics into the 21<sup>st</sup> century."

<sup>77</sup> For a translation, see De Kloet 2010:51.

<sup>78</sup> Yan 2004:245-6.

The use of choruses and expressions such as ‘comrade’ and ‘party branch secretary’ connect The Master Says to this heritage. De Kloet argues that “[band leader] Qiu Ye’s wish to create a pure *Chinese* rock accommodates rather than challenges the dominant notion, namely the uniqueness of China – a notion currently very much in vogue in the Chinese political arena.”<sup>79</sup> But while it is true that some songs and promotional material by The Master Says invite patriotic readings, the band does not follow Tang Dynasty and the CCP in presenting an image of a mighty Chinese nation. Rather than dealing with dragons and heroic battles, The Master Says sing about the relations between parents and children, Beijing bicycles and an old tree. Rather than being straightforwardly assertive, the music as a whole and the use of Chinese elements in songs such as *LOST FOR WORDS* are tongue-in-cheek and playfully juggle elements of the local (Beijing), the national (China), and Buddhist-inspired, free-floating placelessness.

## Second Hand Rose

When Cui Jian saw Second Hand Rose’s first show in the Get Lucky bar in Beijing on August 13<sup>th</sup> 2000, he famously remarked:

The performance of 演奏 and the synergy within 配合 this band are the worst I’ve ever heard, but their concept is the best. Isn’t the music that’s played today just concepts?<sup>80</sup>

The band’s concept is a combination of rock and the Northeast Chinese variety stage tradition called Two-Taking-Turns 二人转. These variety shows are known for their ‘earthy’ 土 nature and vulgarity. I will argue that to Second Hand Rose, references to the local (Northeast China) tradition are secondary to the sinification of rock, which operates on a state or national level.

Lead singer and band leader Liang Long has on multiple occasions acknowledged being influenced by Cui Jian, Tang Dynasty and The Master Says.<sup>81</sup> He also links the name of the band to the sinification of rock:

At the time, the main reason was that I felt that in the national cultural market ... there were many, deep traces of the West ... and especially in bands. After 1999 they all went to Beijing. At the time underground bands were completely westernized, heavy metal, rap, that kind of thing. I felt this was a market for second hand goods.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> De Kloet 2010:54.

<sup>80</sup> Netandtv.com 2003.

<sup>81</sup> Netandtv.com 2003.

<sup>82</sup> Dong 2005.

The Beijing connection is also clear in band membership. After working with a series of drummers and bass players, Second Hand Rose first became a stable formation between June 2001 and January 2005. Of its five band members, Liang Long is the only one from Northeast China. Guitarist Wang Yuqi comes from Henan, and the other three members were born in Beijing. The late Zhang Yue was the drummer of The Master Says between 1995 and 2001, while bassist Chen Jing is well known in the Beijing rock scene as the bassist and later vocalist of Dou Wei's band E.<sup>83</sup>

Furthermore, Second Hand Rose were managed by Beijing heavyweights Niu Jiawei and later Huang Liaoyuan. Wang Yuqi comments:

Huang Liaoyuan liked being our manager a lot, because he felt he was doing something meaningful. His connections and fame helped take Second Hand Rose to another level, increasingly known in cultural and intellectual circles. These people liked us ... and quite a few expected us to become as big as Cui Jian.<sup>84</sup>

Their 2003 debut album was produced by another heavyweight, Wang Di. The liner notes and accompanying promotion praised Second Hand Rose as “the most luscious band in *Chinese* rock music” 中國搖滾樂中最妖嬈的一支樂隊 (*italics added*). Additionally, the lyrics frequently refer to revolutionary history and CCP slogans. The lyrics of the debut are printed over a Mao quotation: “It is our principle that the Party controls the gun; we won't allow the gun to control the Party.” The title of the song ALLOW SOME ARTISTS TO GET RICH FIRST 允許一部分藝術家先富有起來 parodies a slogan of Deng Xiaoping.

In other words, Second Hand Rose subscribes to sinified rock's historical mission. In their response to the dilemma of modernity, Northeast China plays a significant but auxiliary role. In an interview with Zhao Dexin, Liang Long explains how he grew up in Qiqiha'er and Harbin, cities in Northeast China:

Liang Long: “In fact I was also inspired by rock, and took this step [to include folk elements] only later. In the beginning I played metal ... So when I arrived in Beijing, I saw a lot of bands [making similar music] and I felt my own things were powerless, meaningless ... The largest problem was money ... twice I returned home hungry. When I went back to Harbin for the second time, I had given up, and that's when my luck changed. Someone from a peasant village ... said that they had a place for me over there ... to rehearse for weddings and so on and occasionally play some of my own songs. In fact, I had lost interest in my own songs; I did it out of sheer necessity. As I arrived in the village, its fields lay wide open. ... Later I said: “Let's make our own songs!” In fact, at the time I was using these villagers: they gave me a roof over my head and filled my stomach, and it was a bit unhealthy to want to make my own things. But, just to make a living,

<sup>83</sup> Yi 譯 means ‘to translate.’ The transliterated band name E may also refer to the drug XTC.

<sup>84</sup> Conversation, Wang Yuqi, November 2005.

you have no time to worry about things like that. And the one I used in the end was a villager, I had earned money for him, so I don't think it was too evil. ... At the time this villager could play the horizontal bamboo flute 笛子. I asked him if we could add the suona, and so in the course of time the band grew. At the time, this really took off in the village, because the villagers also listened to [*gangtai*] pop music, although they had never heard pop music with the suona. But when I went to Harbin to perform, many people couldn't accept it, although a small group thought this was interesting." ...

Zhao Dexin: "Do you have a deep understanding of Two-Taking-Turns?"

Liang Long: "Not really, I'm almost an outsider."

Zhao Dexin: "But I think that your vocal delivery 唱腔 is flawless!"

Liang Long: "Just pretending (laughs)! I think this is something innate. We're both Northeasterners. Let's say you'd let an American study Two-Taking-Turns from age two, and I'd start at age fifteen. If we competed, the American couldn't possibly beat me. How many years did your dad listen to these things?; that's what is in your genes for sure. A person from south China didn't believe it, and said: "It's impossible, if you haven't studied it, how can you sing like this?" I said: "If you'd want me to sing Cantonese opera, I wouldn't know the first thing. Do you like Cantonese opera?" He said he didn't like it. I said: "Could you please hum a few lines?" To which he replied, "Of course!" Need I say more?<sup>85</sup>

In this interview, cities such as Qiqiha'er and Harbin count as intermediaries between Beijing, whose centrality is never contested, and the Northeastern countryside, which Liang presents as underdeveloped and unspoiled. In 2003, the PRC was experiencing a wave of Northeast China hype, headed by the comedian Zhao Benshan and Xue Cun's *NORTHEASTERNS ARE ALL DO-GOODERS* 東北人都是活雷鋒 (1995, popular in 2001).<sup>86</sup> In these cultural products, Northeasterners are presented as honest and naive country bumpkins, personifying the good side of the revolutionary past and the early years of reform. Second Hand Rose's re-use of Two-Taking-Turns taps into this imagery, for instance in *ODE TO AUNT* 嫂子颂 and *PICKING FLOWERS* 采花.

*ODE TO AUNT* is a cover of the theme song of the 1991 TV series *Zhao Shangzhi* 趙尚志, which depicted the anti-Japanese resistance of Zhao Shangzhi in occupied Northeast China between 1933 and his death in 1942. Despite its indirect lyrics, *ODE TO AUNT* counts as an anti-Japanese song that presents Second Hand Rose as patriotic Northeast Chinese.

The video clip of *PICKING FLOWERS* juxtaposes the local and the national. In one series of images, the band members are portrayed in a traditional Chinese setting. Sitting in

<sup>85</sup> Fenghua 2003. Zhao Dexin is the manager of The Nameless Highground, a rock bar in Beijing.

<sup>86</sup> Wang 2003. I translate "living Lei Feng" as do-gooders. Lei Feng was a part-real, part-mythical model worker who was used in Communist propaganda from the 1960s onward to promote self-effacement for the greater good. Since the 1980s, "a living Lei Feng" has suggested someone who is naive, honest and out of touch with the times.

front of a typical north Chinese courtyard family home 四合院, they wear colorful and festive Chinese outfits and make-up. These outfits and make-up are hyperbolic. Flute player Wu Zekun, sucking on a pacifier, is painted as a baby, while Wang Yuqi makes advances to Liang Long, who is dressed up as a woman. These images present rural China as something to be laughed at and contrast it with the urban scene, which *PICKING FLOWERS* represents with a series of black and white shots in which leather-clad band members run through the concrete jungle of Beijing.

It is too easy to dismiss this as self-Orientalism. Second Hand Rose's strategy enables the positive incorporation of rural and local sounds and images in an urban scene that is focused on catching up with international musical developments. Although the Northeast is ridiculed, at least it gets heard. As such, Second Hand Rose's solution to the dilemma of modernity, however temporary and problematic, has inspired a host of other bands to introduce various local sounds in the national Underground, and in general is part of a slow but steady reevaluation of folk culture across China.

## The Tibetization of Rock and Pop

So far, I have explored geographic and linguistic definitions of China in Chinese popular music. Ethnicity offers a third, partly overlapping way of defining Chineseness. Exploring the relation between ethnicity and Chinese popular music directs our attention to singers of Puyuma, Hmong, Tibetan, Uyghur and other ethnic backgrounds that operate within China's geographic and linguistic borders. I will now discuss the relation of Tibet and Tibetan popular music to Chinese rock, pop and mass music. Apart from the question of ethnicity, Tibet also throws into relief Chinese representations of the premodern, of which Second Hand Rose's Northeast Chinese countryside is another example.

Baranovitch has related ethnicity and rock music in his discussion of the song *RETURN TO LHASA* 回到拉萨 (1994), by the Han-Chinese singer Zheng Jun:

Both rock music, often perceived as synonymous with the West as a whole, and minority images constitute an alternative other in China, onto which members of the Han majority project their suppressed desires and fantasies ... However, like Western rock, minorities do more than just serve as empty bottles that the Han use to contain and articulate their fantasies and criticism. ... Indeed, rock music in China can be understood better as an important minority discourse that challenges the center once one acknowledges the active role that ethnic minority people play in it. ... In this sense, Zheng Jun's voice, though not a minority voice itself, cannot be separated from the voices of [the inner-Mongolian] Teng Ge'er, [the Yi 彝 musician] Lolo, [the ethnically Korean] Cui Jian or the voices of other minority people who spoke around him and certainly influenced him. "Return to Lhasa," nevertheless, also has its ambiguities. The song was, after all, part of an officially encouraged Tibet fever that swept the mainland in the mid-1990s, and although novel and challenging in its approach, it nevertheless still made quite explicit that

Tibet was part of China. This perhaps helps to explain how it was broadcast in mid-1995 both by BTV (Beijing's local television channel) and CCTV.<sup>87</sup>

The album *Sister Drum* 阿姐鼓 (1995) was also part of this Tibet fever. For the production of this album the composer He Xuntian of the Shanghai conservatory made use of extensive field recordings and the latest MIDI technology. *Sister Drum* was recorded by the Cantonese singer Zhu Zheqin (aka Dadawa), whose broad vocal range and abundant inflections and vibratos are as reminiscent of Enya and even Faye Wong as they are of Tibetan folksong. In "The Politics and Poetics of *Sister Drum*: 'Tibetan' Music in the Global Marketplace," Janet Upton writes:

It is easy to condemn *Sister Drum* and products like it for callous appropriation of Tibetan culture to serve Chinese nationalistic ends. This was in fact my first reaction ... But such criticisms fail to consider the potentially radical nature of a product like *Sister Drum* in the PRC context ... By shifting their focus to those aspects of Tibetan culture that can be given positive weight in the context of a changing Chinese value system, popular works like *Sister Drum* can serve as important points of intervention in a discourse that is usually made subservient to state needs alone.<sup>88</sup>

In subsequent years Zhu Zheqin has made an effort to build recognition in China for Tibetan and other 'minority' cultures and spiritualities through her music, through televised travel programs, and (since 2009) as a United Nations Development Program Goodwill Ambassador.

*Sister Drum* was published as 'World Music' by Warner Music International. Upton's article gained much of its momentum from the juxtaposition of Zhu Zheqin's global representation of Tibet and the indignation of Tibetans in exile in the West, who seized the opportunity to present their case.

Baranovitch's "Representing Tibet in the Global Cultural Market: The Case of Chinese-Tibetan Musician Han Hong" distinguishes between four audiences: the Han Chinese audience, the non-PRC-based Tibetan audience, the PRC-based Tibetan audience, and Western audiences. This helps him to focus on the Tibetans in China, arguing that "the exclusion of Han Hong and other integrated minority artists from China from representation in the Western cultural market constitutes a violation of their right to representation."<sup>89</sup>

Han Hong was clearly not the most popular pop singer among Tibetans in China. However, she was certainly popular, despite her fame among Han Chinese, de-

<sup>87</sup> Baranovitch 2003:102-104. cf De Kloet 2010:81-83.

<sup>88</sup> Upton 2002:113-115.

<sup>89</sup> Baranovitch 2009:190.

spite the fact that she knew little Tibetan and sang most of her songs in Chinese, despite the fact that her father was Han Chinese and she had grown up in Beijing, and despite the fact that she had spent years in the army and sang some of the most official songs about Tibet. ... modern Tibetan popular music is a hybrid that cannot be separated from contemporary Chinese popular music.<sup>90</sup>

Baranovitch's observations are supported by Anna Morcom's analysis of the Tibetan music industry. Generally very critical of Han-Chinese influence in Tibetan cultural production, Morcom also shows that Chengdu is the main center of Tibetan music and that sufficient profit is only possible "if a substantial number of the songs on the album are sung in Chinese, which appeals to all regions of Tibet as well as to some Chinese people."<sup>91</sup>

In sum, when the popular music of non-Han peoples within the PRC is concerned, language and geography are stronger indicators than ethnicity. I will tentatively consider Tibetan pop, as well as Mongolian, Uyghur, Hmong and Puyuma pop, to be part of Chinese popular music, especially when sung in Mandarin. But these are contested boundaries, over which I do not claim to have a final say. My appropriation does not foreclose the possibility that Tibetan pop also participates in other local, state, regional and international scenes, which could for instance be argued by stressing its connections to Amdo *dunglen* and Bollywood.

## §4 Local World Music

I have defined the Chineseness of Chinese popular music not by demarcating clear boundaries, but by identifying geographic, linguistic and ethnic centers: Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taipei and Beijing; Cantonese and Mandarin; Han-Chinese. The definition is rough at the edges, where Greater China merges into other cultural areas.

Although I believe that my choice of focusing on Greater China is defensible, I concede that other perspectives are possible. Like the jute background (symbolizing the chaos of everyday life) on The Master Says' album cover, Greater China of course is frayed not only at the edges: it is impossible to disentangle the centers of Chinese popular music from Japanese, South Korean and even Euro-American popular music.<sup>92</sup> Below I will explore how the local connects to the global more or less directly, circumventing or de-emphasizing the state (PRC) and the regional (Greater China). Continuing the exploration of my definition of Chinese popular



Illustration 1.10: Cover of The Master Says' 1997 album Volume One.

<sup>90</sup> Baranovitch 2009:204, 205.

<sup>91</sup> Morcom 2008:268.

<sup>92</sup> De Kloet 2010:50.

music as popular music in Chinese languages, I will pay attention to the liminal cases of mantras, made-up languages and instrumental music.

### Om Mani Padme Hum

Like Zhu Zheqin, Sa Dingding started by recording with He Xuntian. However, unlike Zhu in the previous year, Sa did manage to secure the Asia/Pacific World Music Award from BBC Radio 3 in 2008, with her debut *Alive* 万物生 (2007). The jury report reads:

Sa Dingding's musical philosophy is very much informed by her studies of Buddhism and Dyana yoga. Her recordings make full use of impressive linguistic abilities, featuring lyrics she has written in Mandarin, Sanskrit, Tibetan and the near-extinct Lagu language, as well as an imaginary self-created language which she says is generated from the emotions evoked by the music.<sup>93</sup>

In Sa's music, local, global and placeless New Age spirituality features at least as prominent as Chineseness or Tibetanness. In an interview, Sa explains how she worked on her debut with Grammy jury member Eric T. Johnson, and with British producer Marius de Vries, best known for his collaborations with Björk, on her second album *Harmony* 天地合 (2009). In the very next paragraph she criticizes the superficial use of Chinese elements in the service of Western concepts and technology. But according to Sa, her use of Chinese 中國 elements is authentic because it is a response to the typical bustling in the street outside her bedroom window, and because it features local musicians and instruments. Sa concludes by explaining how she ended up making an album about an ethnic minority area (now Yunnan Province) while paying the area only a short visit: "that's because I'm afraid of being completely influenced and forgetting my own impressions."<sup>94</sup> In the space of a single page, global, national and local levels of activity appear as harmonious elements of Sa Dingding's music.

The title *Harmony* might appear to echo 'Harmonious Society' 和諧社會, the PRC's political slogan of the day, but the resemblance has no impact in English, as befits World Music's taste for the spiritual over the political.

Wang Yong is an early 1990s example of a PRC musician who developed from rock into New Age music. He consistently downplays the importance of sinification and the nation:<sup>95</sup>

Personally, I'd like to move in the direction of the world. In my own music, the musical component is extremely important, which means the linguistic barrier should be dissolving. But, to many rock bands, their *raison d'être* is, well, facing the fact that China originally didn't have this, and now that it's there, they want to

<sup>93</sup> Lusk 2008.

<sup>94</sup> Wenweipo 2010.

<sup>95</sup> FM97.4:2005.

adjust it to China, and change it into China's own special rock music, which I think is really great. But to me personally, I would rather like to make global music. Blending rock and Chinese folk musics is possible ... but nobody knows how.

96

This interview with Wang Yong in the documentary *Rock in Berlin: The Chinese Avant-Garde* is embedded in footage of his performance in Berlin in 1993, together with Cobra, Tang Dynasty and Cui Jian. The conservatory-educated Wang Yong was the keyboard and guzheng player in Cui's band. In his Berlin solo show, Wang Yong plays the guzheng and later a twelve-stringed acoustic guitar, supported by a DAT recording. He rarely sings, and if he does, the words are hardly intelligible: they are delivered in a low voice over a mix of low chants of the Buddhist mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum," with the wooden fish (wood block) and religious bells in the background – especially on the last three tracks of Wang's only solo album *Samsara* 往生 (1996). The chorus of the title

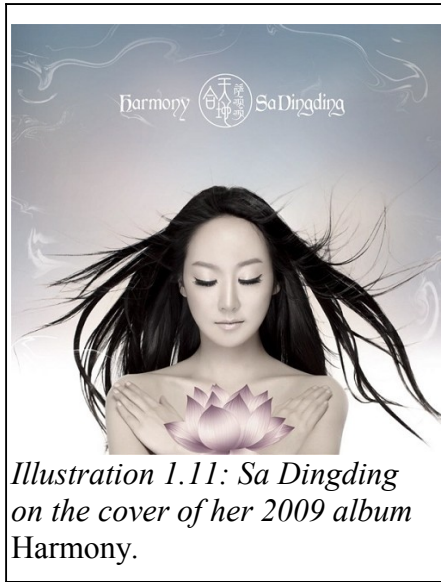


Illustration 1.11: Sa Dingding on the cover of her 2009 album *Harmony*.

song of Zhu Zheqin's *Sister Drum* also consists of reciting Om Mani Padme Hum, which is associated in particular with Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>97</sup>

Similarly, Sa Dingding prefers prayers, mantras and sutras over slogans and political speeches. For instance, XI RAN NING PO—INTROSPECTION 希然寧泊—自省。心經 combines nonsensical lyrics with quotations from the Heart Sutra, including the sinified version of its central Sanskrit mantra. The music is reminiscent of the combination of electronics and World Music in the lounge music of the successful Buddha bar album series, initiated by the French DJ Claude Challe in 1999. But it borrows also from the prerecorded Buddhist chanting blared out through loudspeakers from many a Chinese

temple. Numerous versions of the DANCEABLE GREAT COMPASSION MANTRA 舞曲大悲咒 set this centuries-old transliteration of the Sanskrit text to electronic dance music.<sup>98</sup> Sa Dingding's self-created language 自語 is reminiscent of these unintelligible religious syllables and oscillates between holiness and childish naiveté:

I believe that everyone will experience this most unspoiled 原始態 phase before they learn complex language in their childhood. You haven't learned any complex language yet and can only express I "want it" and I "don't want it" or I "like it"

<sup>96</sup> Manceaux 1993:26-28min.

<sup>97</sup> Upton 2002:104.

<sup>98</sup> Chen 2005:281.

and I “don’t like it.” However, before this is restricted by a rational and complex linguistic system, its emotions are perhaps more direct and pure.<sup>99</sup>

## Unsinging Words

Ten years before Sa Dingding’s debut, Faye Wong’s *Impatience* contained three songs in an unintelligible language and two in which unintelligible words blend seamlessly into the lyrics. At the time, *Impatience* upset the industry and it still counts as Wong’s most experimental album. However, given Wong’s general prominence in the 1990s, these songs became well known and appreciated despite initial low sales figures and poor reviews.

Wong uses unintelligible words to suggest freedom and spontaneity. Not only politics, but also religion and tradition, seem of little relevance to her. The album sounds cosmopolitan: the two songs composed by the Scottish band Cocteau Twins don’t stand out as foreign. Unlike Wang, Zhu and Sa, Wong doesn’t reuse clichéd Buddhist sounds. Nevertheless, her well-known Buddhism can be related to her general approach and sound. In 1995 Wong participated in a recording of the Heart Sutra and in 2001 she recorded more pious songs and sang the backing vocals of a recital by the lama Zopa Rinpoche (Faye 2001NOV). Additionally, her lyrics often allude to Buddhism, and her unintelligible words also foreground the transient nature of reality – for instance, in the opening song, *INSTABILITY* 無常.

The only specific reference to tradition on *Impatience* is the album cover, which indirectly alludes to the words of Confucius: “Watch nothing improper, say nothing improper” 非礼勿视, 非礼勿言. Inside the CD box, the third part of the saying, “listen to nothing improper,” is enacted by a picture of Wong covering her ears. For album producer Dou Wei, who married Wong when *Restless* came out, the album was part of a transition from a commercially successful pop rock singer to an artistically successful experimental musician. For Dou Wei, these experiments – in contrast to those of Faye Wong – contain a reevaluation of Chinese tradition.

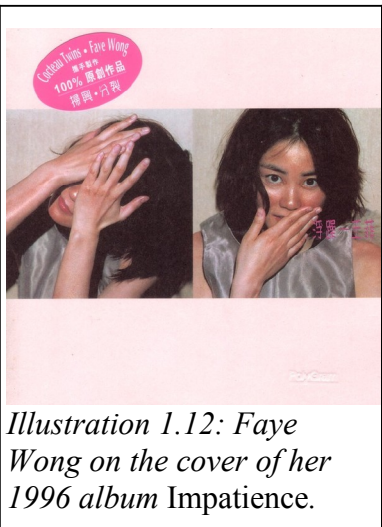


Illustration 1.12: Faye Wong on the cover of her 1996 album *Impatience*.

Between 1988 and 1992, Dou Wei was the lead singer and songwriter of the pop rock band Black Panther, the first PRC band to top the Hong Kong charts. His solo album *Black Dream* 黑夢 (1994) dealt with modern city life and sold well, including in Taiwan. By contrast, *Sunny Days* 艳阳天 (1995) starts with Chinese temple music, and the lyrics of *Mountain River* 山河水 (1998) are archaic and enigmatic. After *Rainy Murmur* 雨吁 (2000), Dou Wei stopped singing altogether.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Lü 2009: 72.

<sup>100</sup> Wang 2007:244-249, Yan 2004:40-47.

Yuyu, 'rainy murmur,' is not a common Chinese expression. It is a homonym of 'language desire,' but also a more or less meaningless sound. Dou Wei constantly plays with these possibilities, making the most of the succinctness and polysemy of classical Chinese. I speak of 'unsinging words' with reference to a Chinese saying that is mentioned in an interview that the poet, music critic and sound artist Yan Jun conducted with Dou Wei. They conclude on the old saying which might be translated as 'everything is in the unsaid words' 盡在不言中, and on 'unsaying words' is not the same as 'not saying words' 所謂“不言”非“無言.” In the postscript Yan comments that this was the most tiresome interview he ever did – and he has done quite a few – since “from the beginning we agreed that the spoken word isn't the best way of communicating.”<sup>101</sup>

In these ponderings, Dou Wei resembles a classical man of letters 文人, indeed a hermit. Unsurprisingly, in the albums Dou Wei made with the collective Duskgood, Civil and King between 2002 and 2005, the guqin features prominently, as this is the penultimate literati instrument, next to the yangqin 揚琴 (dulcimer) and Chinese flutes such as the xun 埙 (vessel flute or ocarina) and the xiao 簫 (vertical notched bamboo flute). Many of the tracks also contain keyboards, and almost all the songs are improvised, something that rarely happens at the Chinese conservatories where these instruments are studied. The title of the double album *Mountain Bean Several Stone Leaves, Sacrificially Tasting Pneuma Country* 山豆幾石頁, 祭然品氣國 (2005) is composed of the names of the tracks, five on each CD. Understanding, let alone translating, the album title seems impossible, which may well be the point.

## The Most Ancient is the Most Modern

Dou Wei's development from pop star to record-spilling improvisational and ambient musician is unique in China. However, in the course of the 1990s, other Beijing-based musicians also started to experiment with sound, most notably the duo FM3 and later Yan Jun himself. Like Dou Wei, many of these musicians had a background in rock music and started by exploring the possibilities of instruments such as guitar, keyboards and drums. Some, like Feng Jiangzhou and Wang Fan, developed into the direction of noise. The 2pi Festival in Hangzhou (held yearly between 2003 and 2007) and especially the four-day festival Sounding Beijing in 2003 provided momentum for this scene. Besides being a chronicler of this scene, Yan Jun is crucial as a hub in a large and increasingly transnational network of sound artists.<sup>102</sup>

The sound art scene is more international than the rock scene. Collaborations across Greater China and beyond are frequent. Sounding Beijing, organized by the Berkeley-based Taiwan-born sound artist Dajun Yao, presented Polish, French, Austrian, Japanese, US and Chinese artists. Greater China is surveyed in samplers such as the quadruple album *An Anthology of Chinese Electronic Music 1992-2008*, from the prestigious Belgian label Sub Rosa. Artists from neighboring Asian countries frequently perform in Yan

<sup>101</sup> Yan 2003.

<sup>102</sup> Yan 2006; 2008.

Jun's weekly series of experimental music shows titled 'Waterland Kwanyin,' and since 2003 they have published their albums through his label Kwanyin Records. Yan Jun himself published his *Lamma Island Diary* 南丫島日記 (2009) at Re-Records, based in Hong Kong.

The relative ease with which these individual acts travel accounts in part for the regional and transnational nature of the sound art scene. The artists are usually relatively well-off urban middle-class men in their thirties, and they don't carry much equipment with them. Yan Jun has traveled more than any Chinese rock band. Another explanation relates to sound art's links with the modern art scene, which has a focus on the international market. For example, Zafka's soundscape *i•Mirror* (2008) was part of the artist Cao Fei's renowned Second Life project *China Tracy*.

Soundscapes became popular in the sound art scene after the Sound and the City 都市發聲 project, sponsored by the British Council, in 2005 and 2006. The Moving Soundscapes 聽遊記 and Home Shows 咖哩秀 of the new media festival Get It Louder 2007 in Shenzhen, Chengdu, Shanghai and Beijing reconnected audiences with their sonic environment. Many of these projects have a direct connection with geographical locations and come with maps. Hitlike and Wang Changcun's Sound Mapping Website 聲音地圖 (2009) consists of a Google map of China with clickable icons for local sound excerpts.<sup>103</sup>

The fragments of Laurent Jeanneau's *Soundscape China* 音景中國 (2007) cite stereotypical situations in Chinese society, such as folksongs, Peking Opera, morning exercises at a high school, stock phrases from cinema, eulogies of Mao Zedong and a talking calculator at a market. Often these sounds are superimposed to draw contrasts between tradition and modernity, and between reality and its socially desirable version. Language is important: Jeanneau often recontextualizes words or cuts them up beyond recognition.

The juxtaposition of tradition and modernity is a recurrent theme in Chinese sound art. Audibly technologically manipulated sounds may represent modernity – for instance Jeanneau's use of distortion in an excerpt from Peking Opera, or Yan Jun's use of loops and feedback when improvising with The Other Two Comrades (2004) or with guqin player Wu Na (2009). In these and similar works, the analogue and digital exist simultaneously in the same space, and the occasional field recording may roughly locate the place. These pieces suggest that the past continues today and that, vice versa, non-harmonic, electronically produced sounds reconnect listeners with ancient and forgotten sonic qualities.

Again, these techniques connect with the dilemma of modernity, as most technology is imported. Basile Zimmermann argues that up to the present, Chinese electronic music has developed on the basis of an accumulation of choices embedded in the sam-

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<sup>103</sup> Hitlike 2009.

ples, plug-ins, patches and other software and technology created outside China (predominantly in the West). He concludes:

An absence of local technology, as exists now in China in the digital arts, implies an absence of local culture in the artists' works. Looking at contemporary arts that make important use of Western technological tools, one can wonder whether the Chinese will have to reinvent the technology itself to be able to surprise us with new concepts analogous to eating with chopsticks or using characters to communicate.<sup>104</sup>

However, the technology used by the artists discussed in this section is often deliberately lo-fi and thoroughly enmeshed in local society. Yan Jun's field recording of the second-hand electronics market Qiu Jiang Lu was printed there as CD in 2008, and reused for a soundwalk in Manchester. FM3's internationally successful Buddha Machine 唱佛機 (since 2005) is a small plastic box with hardwired ambient loops modeled after machines that recite Buddhist sutras.

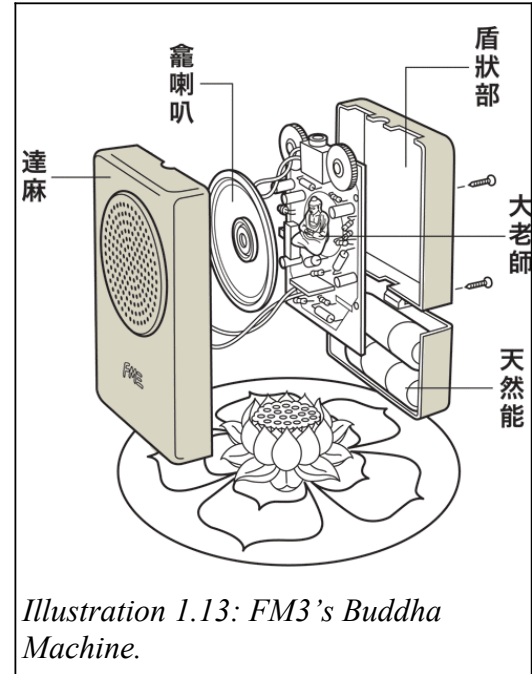


Illustration 1.13: FM3's Buddha Machine.

## Xiao He's Bird Language

Like the experimental electronic musicians mentioned above, Xiao He developed from rock and folk into less defined musical areas. Born in 1975 in the industrial city of Handan in Hebei, he started his musical career in the army, where his parents had sent him to cure his temper. When he got out in 1995 he went to Beijing, bought an electric guitar and started to play metal. Between 1996 and 1997, after playing in several unsuccessful bands, Xiao He spent a year in Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province. Back in Beijing, Xiao He traded his electric guitar for an acoustic one, and in 1999 formed Glorious Pharmacy. With Glorious Pharmacy, Xiao He strove to be as free as possible, venturing into jazz, folk, and performance art. In his solo performances he developed an interest both in local traditions and in nonsensical language.

Xiao He's first solo album, *Birds that Can Fly High Don't Land on the Backs of Oxen that Can't Run Fast*, was recorded live in the River Bar in August 2002. The first three songs of the album contain no intelligible words, with THE JAPANESE SONG GUO LONG POINTED OUT 郭龍所指的那首日本歌 vaguely mimicking Japanese. In songs like THAT'S NOT MY NAME 那不是我的名字, Xiao He overstrains his voice in a way reminiscent of North Chinese traditions of Mountain Song 山歌. JUMPING DOWN 跳下去 also shifts quick-

<sup>104</sup> Zimmermann 2005:57.

ly and dramatically in volume. The song starts with long drawn-out chords on the harmonica and what seem to be improvised notes picked on the acoustic guitar.

跳下去 跳下去	Jumping down, jumping down,
就像從來都沒有出生過	as if I was never born.
跳下去	Jumping down.
如果你聽到有人!尖叫!	If you hear someone <b>crying out!</b>

*[Guitar chords and small crescendos on the accordion dramatize the following half-sentences:]*

那是我滑過她的窗台時	It is, when I slide over her windowsill,
是她的驚喜	her excitement.
跳下去	<i>[softly]</i> Jumping down.

*[The guitar once again plays variations of a continuous picked melody and stops for the following verse, which rhythmically mirrors the first verse, but with much more silence, and tenderness rather than excitement:]*

撫摸著我的一生	Stroking this life of mine.
就像撫摸著媽媽懷我時	Just like, when my mother was carrying me,
隆起的肚子	stroking her protruding belly.
跳下去	<i>[almost inaudibly]</i> Jumping down.

*[Again, there is a variation in the picked melody, like running water. The next phrases are almost a capella, until guitar and accordion join in at the last word, playing ornaments:]*

這個世界又清新又涼爽	This world is <b>both fresh and cool</b> .
這次再也不用了結束	This time no longer needs to end.
這個世界又清新又涼爽	This world is <b>both fresh and cool</b> .
這此再也不用了謝幕	This time no longer needs to accept applause.
阿彌陀佛	Amitābha.

*[The hand drum joins in. Xiao He repeats the last mantra. Amitābha, the Buddha of Limitless Life, is the primary Buddha of the Pure Land school.]*

In this and other songs Xiao He performs the bliss of the unborn, in his mother's belly or his lover's arms, listening full of wonder to the sounds of the outside world.

Chineseness is not important in Xiao He's music. When I brought up the sinification of rock with Xiao He and asked him what he thought of bands like The Master Says and Second Hand Rose, he replied:

Combining Chinese and Western music in this way is no good, because all things that are combined fail to appeal to people. Including, when you mix a bed and a toilet so that you can shit in your bed and sleep in the toilet, of course you'd be uncomfortable. Originally they're two things, why would anyone want to combine them? This lacks a character of its own. To me, all these things, things from the city, from the mountains, or things no one ever heard, or even noise, all of it is part of our lives. In the end they're all folk 民間.<sup>105</sup>

Xiao He criticizes attempts to mix East and West – say, Two-Taking-Turns and rock – while at the same time reiterating essential differences. To him, borders should be permeable and it should hardly matter whether someone borrows from Chinese, Central Asian, Indian, Afro-American or South American traditions.

Xiao He's nonsensical language connects and encompasses these various local-cum-global sounds. Furthermore, in an interview with music critic Zhang Xiaozhou and singer-songwriter Zhou Yunpeng, he relates it to a non-place.

Zhou: "When you play in bars, you hardly use any concrete lyrics. In many songs you choose to sing those tonal 音階性 things. What do lyrics of this kind of mean in your music?" ...

Xiao He: "If the lyrics aren't good, especially during improvisations, it's better not to sing them at all. Because the space of music is originally larger. Especially Chinese 漢語, if you sing a word in improvisation, suddenly all of the music becomes concrete. If you sing well, you can get more people involved, and once they are inside, they feel the music is really big. But improvising like this, it's better not to say anything at all."

Zhang: "To me it's birds, bird people 鳥人 [i.e. annoying people]."

Zhou: "Bird sounds."

Zhang: "*Birds that Fly High* [i.e. Xiao He's album title]! With all sorts of birds, making these bird sounds, forests seem larger. Enter the feeling of space."

Xiao He: "When you hear bird sounds, the forest's there." ...

Zhang: "This improvising and not singing words, I think it's traditionally a part of folksong. When I hear it, I cannot decide whether the people of old did it like this too, but I think it's innate, it's what humans are. Imitating the sounds of nature to hunt in groups ... The things that people reproduce today, including those of the former aboriginals 土著 of the Brazilian Amazon, of course isn't concrete any-

<sup>105</sup> Conversation, Xiao He, April 2004.

more. This is what you called both the most avant-garde and the most ancient, the most ‘earthy’ 土. I think this is very harmonious in your work.”

Xiao He: “That is, to reemploy them in performance, they need to go through a process of sorting out and sedimentation, which isn’t easy. This hasn’t matured yet.”

Zhou: “Will you sing in Chinese, then?”

Xiao He: “Yes, but I still prefer being spontaneous.”<sup>106</sup>

Xiao He’s second solo album, *The Performance of Identity*, contains no intelligible language. The song MTV PLAY MTV 戲 starts with ultra-low overtone singing, moves quickly into Peking Opera’s characteristic exaggeration of Chinese speech tones, then falls into a rock guitar riff. It then derails while Xiao He mimics the guitar with his voice in heterophony, to finally end in another low blurt and a stylized laugh, “Haha.”

## §5 Concluding Remarks

The East Asian volume of the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* has an entry on “Music and Chinese Society: The Local, the National, and the Transnational in Hong Kong,” by J. Lawrence Witzleben:

Although the Western influences [on cantopop] are obvious, the choice of which elements to imitate or expand on shows many affinities with traditional Chinese musical values. Singers become popular for their voices (rarely for their compositions); “raspy” timbres are not favored; clear articulation of the lyrics and clear speech tones are essential ... From a popular, emic Hong Kong perspective, the use of Chinese musical instruments (as in the modern Chinese orchestra) or of the Chinese language (for Cantonese pop) is considered to be a sufficient criterion for defining a music as “Chinese,” whereas, in other contexts, the definition may be expanded to indicate music in any idiom that is created by a Chinese person.<sup>107</sup>

I define the Chineseness of Chinese popular music by a combination of language, geography and ethnicity. Of these three, language is most readily discernible in the musical product: Mandarin in mandapop and Cantonese in cantopop. Furthermore, language also features in the use of classical Chinese poems, Communist jargon, dialects such as North-east Chinese, local sayings such as ho-hai-yan and mantras such as Om Mani Padme Hum. As such, language forms a window on the five levels of place discussed in this chapter: local, state, regional, global, and placeless or escapist.

Ranging from free-floating cosmopolitan consumerism to devout investment in the afterlife, the last of these five categories remains the most elusive. I will return to mu-

<sup>106</sup> Lao Yang 2005.

<sup>107</sup> Witzleben 2002a:436.

sic's ability to take audiences to other worlds in Chapter 3. Meanwhile, the focus of this study remains on regional Greater China. At the same time, I shall not exclude people and music that challenge my scope and focus, for instance, the participation of distinctively Tibetan pop in several music scenes. Jeroen de Kloet points to another challenge when he argues that the sinification of rock during the 1990s undermined the regional level. Although Taiwanese and Hong Kong record companies were the main investors in Beijing rock in the early 1990s, they pulled out of the market when it proved unprofitable, to be replaced by local companies that were mainly inspired by opportunism.<sup>108</sup> De Kloet writes:

The assumed emergence of a 'Greater China' covers up cultural struggles that proliferate between companies and artists, struggles in which 'national characteristic' are articulated in order to explain perceived local and regional differences and strengthen one's own position. 'Greater China' turns out to be both more fragmented and less great than is often assumed. The local turn signifies a move away from a focus on making rock with Chinese characteristics, towards making rock that meets global – that is, Western – standards. It reflects a desire to become truly cosmopolitan, which is coupled to a desire to have Chinese rock enter the global music market. Whereas the regional companies focus on making rock with Chinese characteristics, the local companies aim at making international rock that comes from China. In both cases, 'Chineseness' remains the key signifier to articulate sonic difference with the West.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> These consisted mainly of (1) Great Earth, mentioned in relation to Huang Liaoyuan and Ai Jing, in Hong Kong, and (2) the Taiwan-based record company Rock Records and its subsidiary Magic Stone.

<sup>109</sup> De Kloet 2002:103.

# Chapter 2:

## Genre and Classification

### §1 Chinese *Popular Music*

My working definition of popular music hinges on its relation to the mass media, and on considering its emergence and transformations in tandem with the masses (urbanization, adolescence, yuppies) and the media (phonograph, radio, MTV, MP3, MySpace). This working definition will remain undeveloped, because I have chosen not to focus on distinguishing popular music from other musics, but on subdivisions within popular music. However, this still involves addressing popular music's appellation of the mass, the popular and the People.<sup>1</sup>

I will discuss music and artists that I tentatively group under the labels sinified rock, fringe pop, and new folk. However, I hypothesize that rather than around genres Chinese popular is structured around the four organizational principles language-geography-ethnicity, generation, gender, and marketability. Is rock subversive, pop hegemonic, and folk conservative, and are these the right questions?

### Territories in Hyperspace

Genre seems to offer the most obvious way of subdividing and categorizing popular music. In 1982, Franco Fabbri proposed the following definition:

A musical genre is “a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules.”<sup>2</sup>

Later Fabbri proposed the treatment of musics as “multidimensional cultural entities, which can be represented mentally as objects in an n-dimensional hyperspace.”<sup>3</sup> A hypothetical research team embarking on a project of mapping genres would first design a mathematical hyperspace with quantifiable aspects of music events as its dimensions, according to six categories of attributes proposed by Fabbri: the formal and technical, the semiotic, the behavioral, the social, the ideological and finally the economic and juridical. While new dimensions were still being added to the hyperspace, the team would begin assigning music events to coordinates. It would soon appear that these music events were spread unevenly, and could be divided into clusters by an algorithm. Finally, the team would describe the contours of these clusters in precise mathematical language.

This thought experiment is not as fantastic as it might seem. The vast amount of digitalized music that now exists has prompted databases and their users to build comput-

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<sup>1</sup> Middleton 2006:1-36.

<sup>2</sup> Fabbri 1982:1.

<sup>3</sup> Fabbri 1999:12.

er programs that improve categorization and searchability. However, the mathematicians involved in mapping projects argue that the results of projects such as those of my hypothetical research team are unlikely to result in known genres.<sup>4</sup> Fabbri predicted this by insisting on *socially accepted* rules, rather than objectively verifiable ones. In other words, the classification of music differs from biological taxonomy and the periodic table because in biology and chemistry, phylogenetics and atomic number provide objectively verifiable organizational principles. In music, there is no such principle. This will remain the case, because genres arise out of the social interaction of sounds, audiences and musicians. Unlike biological species or chemical elements, audiences and musicians interact with musical categories, and songs comment upon their own genre identity. In music, labels are not external and descriptive, but integrated in and emergent from the music event.

## Articulation

Rephrasing and expanding my hypothesis, I argue that in China genres are less pronounced and articulated than in the West. By articulation I mean the transformative process in which a cluster of music events transcends descriptive similarities (homologies in the hyperspace) and becomes a coherent and discernible discourse.<sup>5</sup> This means, among other things, that a cultural form can be performed by different people across time and space without losing its identity: a-go-go in Singapore, reggae in Berlin, Peking Opera in San Francisco.

If a cluster is fully articulated or galvanized, it becomes what Appadurai has called a hard cultural form: “a set of links between value, meaning, and embodied practice that are difficult to break and hard to transform.”<sup>6</sup> By foregrounding the pliability of genre, my hypothesis attempts to go beyond Jeroen de Kloet’s presentation of Underground, heavy metal, hardcore punk and hip-hop as hard scenes in China. He argues:

Scenes proliferate around specific genres, these musical collectives involve the participation of musicians, audiences, and producers, all of whom articulate specific social identities in and through music.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, next to aiding the organization and communication of large sets of information and complex esthetics by dividing them into more manageable chunks, another *raison d’être* of genre is its ability to connect sounds to social identities. Pierre Bourdieu and the Birmingham school have argued that in Europe, taste and genre are markers of so-

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<sup>4</sup> Duda 2000:454-456. Scaringella 2006:11. The solution Scaringella proposes is to teach a learning algorithm what genres are by supplying it with paradigmatic examples. This supervised approach defeats our purpose, because it presupposes knowledge of paradigmatic examples of specific genres. Cf. MIREX 2009.

<sup>5</sup> On genres as worlds, see Frow 2006:83-92.

<sup>6</sup> Appadurai 1996:90.

<sup>7</sup> De Kloet 2010:41. On hard scenes, see De Kloet 2010: 28-31, 37-74.

cial identity.<sup>8</sup> These studies, and many others inspired by them, invest music with social relevance by tying it to communities through notions of genre and style. This is the more political side of the concept of articulation, as formulated by Ernest Laclau and Stuart Hall:

A theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together with a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulate, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects. ... it enables us to think how an ideology empowers people, enabling them to begin to make some sense or intelligibility of their historical situation, without reducing those forms of intelligibility to their socio-economic or class location or social position.<sup>9</sup>

In China, according to a 2008 survey by Wang Jing, this articulation of social position through cultural products is problematic:

While market segmentation of tweens and youths in the West takes place primarily on the basis of their musical taste ... no such equation exists in China. Not only do Chinese youths have extremely eclectic musical preferences, but they bond quickly with singers who have a knack for creating a “chop-suey” musical experience. Loyalty to a single pop singer rarely occurs for long, and Chinese youth do not adhere to a stable set of mixed genres. Musicians who have a shifting fusion of styles stand a better chance of appealing to this fickle clientèle. This finding contradicts an additional assumption made by many transnational music marketers: that Asian youth, like their counterparts in developed worlds, are increasingly willing to follow a particular type of music (such as hip-hop).<sup>10</sup>

## Organizational Principles

Western musicology defines popular music by its difference from folk and art or classical music. These categories are based on the feudal division of aristocracy (art music), peasantry (folk music) and bourgeoisie (pop music), and thus reiterate European class divisions.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Simon Frith argues that these carry ethical and esthetic connotations: folk values authenticity; art music, originality (or talent); and popular music – well, popularity.<sup>12</sup>

Exposing genre as a Eurocentric, 19<sup>th</sup>-century concept is not enough. To avoid presenting Chinese popular music as an indifferent blur, or worse still, falling into exceptionalism that presents China as the eternally unintelligible Other, I will briefly survey the

<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu 1993;1996, Hebdige 1979.

<sup>9</sup> Hall 1996:141-142.

<sup>10</sup> Wang 2008:216.

<sup>11</sup> Koskoff 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Frith 1996:36-46.

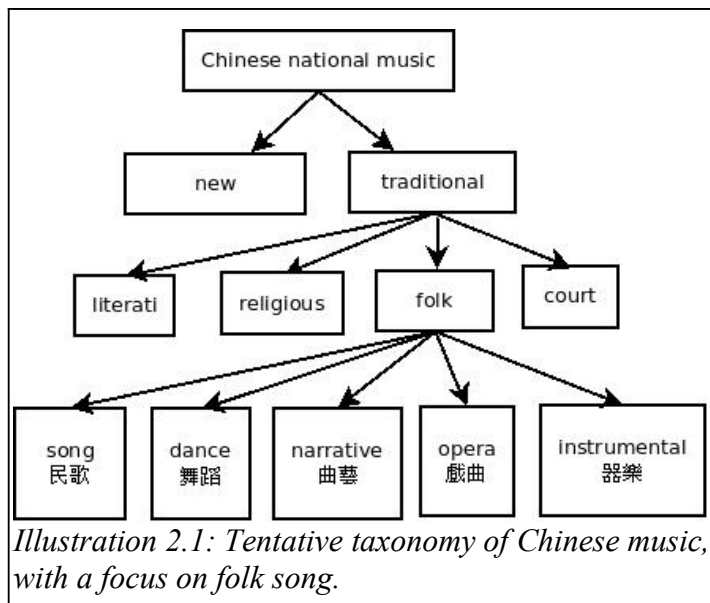
importation of genre into Chinese discourse, paying attention to alternative classifications.

First, Chinese terminology. ‘Genre’ is translated as *leixing* 類型 ‘typological classification,’ and ‘musical genre’ as ‘musical *leixing*.’ In colloquial speech, related terms such as *liupai* 流派, ‘school, lineage,’ and *fengge* 風格, ‘style,’ are interchangeable with *leixing*. None of these terms is restricted to music, and there seem to be no other Chinese expressions that can categorize or label music in ways comparable to genre.

Second, folk music classifications. The categorization introduced by the *Introduction to National Music* 民族音樂概論 (1964) still dominates folk music anthologies and overviews in the PRC today. Compiled by sixty Chinese musicologists in 1960 under the supervision of the Central Conservatory, this schoolbook argues: “In the course of its long historical development, national music has formed the five big categories of traditional music: song, dance music, narrative singing, opera and instrumental.”<sup>13</sup>

This project again attests to the ideologically informed decisions underlying seemingly transparent taxonomies. *Introduction to National Music* pits folk music 民間音樂 against non-folk music, specified as literati music, court music and religious music. Because Communist ideology deemed intellectual, political and religious culture to be re-

actionary, *Introduction to National Music* categorically excludes non-folk. Traditional music is folk music. The exclusion of religious music in particular has prompted post-1970s anthologies to add genres or insert a layer that shows that there is more to traditional music than folk music (see Illustration 2.2). The shift of emphasis in books such as *Introduction to Chinese Traditional Music* 中國傳統音樂概論 (2000) coincides with the reevaluation of imperial



China and Confucianism in the PRC of the 1990s.<sup>14</sup> More significantly, while discussing new music, *Introduction to National Music*, like most Chinese sources, neglects genre.

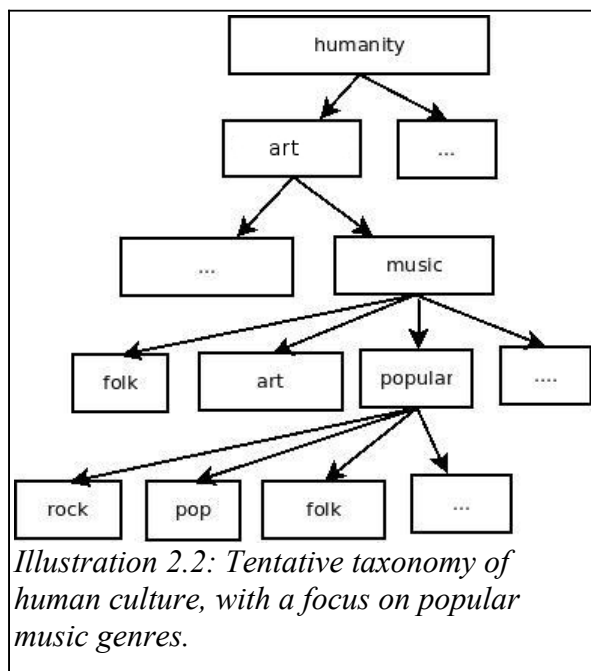
The few words the 1964 publication devotes to new music still apply to contemporary mass and popular music:

In developing national music, it is permissible and even recommendable to borrow from the useful experiences of foreign musics. Additionally, absorbing exter-

<sup>13</sup> China Music Institute 1964:2. Cf. Tuohy 1999: 52.

<sup>14</sup> Du 2000.

nal music forms (skills and techniques) ... is also effective and necessary. But the goal of absorbing and borrowing is to develop national music and create a new music that is socialist and national, and not to let foreign music dissolve national music. Therefore, all external experiences must be duly digested, and can absolutely not be rigidly applied. All external music forms (skills and techniques) must be made to suit the demands of national life, language, cultural tradition and esthetics, going through national modification.<sup>15</sup>



Thirdly, recent surveys with a focus on popular music, such as *Chinese Mass Music* 中國大眾音樂 (2003) and *History and Styles of Popular Music* 流行音樂歷史與風格 (2007), also ignore genre. Whereas the former stresses continuity between folk and popular music (cf. §4), the latter devotes volume one (367 pages) to the Western popular music genres of blues, jazz, country, rock, soul, latin, reggae, disco, hip-hop and New Age, while it divides the 177 pages of the second volume on Chinese 中國 popular music into the stages of Shanghai 1920s-1970s, Taiwan 1975-1990s, Hong Kong 1974-1990s, PRC 1979-1990s, and 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> Before anything else, the opposition of Western and Chinese popular music reinstates the primacy of geography in musical classification.

A fourth possible site of consecrating genres is award ceremonies. At least four-fifths of the Grammy Awards are awarded in genre categories. By contrast, categories in the trend-setting Taiwanese Golden Melody Awards depend rather on (1) profession (2) gender and (3) language. Golden Melody's main division into popular music on the one hand and traditional and art music on the other is similar to *Introduction to National Music*'s division into new and traditional music. Only a few awards within the traditional and art music category are motivated by genre (see Illustration 2.3).

The award ceremony's division into languages has a foundation in folk anthologies that subdivide the genres proposed by *Introduction to National Music*, or otherwise organize their material according to the overlapping principles of the language, geographic location and ethnicity of its producers: Peking Opera, Northwest Wind, Tibetan mountain songs.

<sup>15</sup> China Music Institute 1964:4-6. The book states that it excludes all music composed since May 4th, 1919, but Du Yaxiong and Seng Haibo point out that while early 1900s classroom song and piano adaptations are excluded, later folk genres and *erhu* tunes are included (Du 2000:3).

<sup>16</sup> You 2007.

Finally, like overview works and award ceremonies, many CD shops and websites explicitly organize music into the categories of (1) language-geography-ethnicity, (2) generation and (3) gender, with the third of these modified to distinguish between male singers 男歌手, female singers 女歌手 and group 組合 or band 樂隊 performances.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes all non-mainstream popular music is filed under the ‘band’ label, including solo albums of rock singers. This points to a final principle of organization: (4) marketability. Marketability addresses the gap I observe in the PRC between mainstream pop and the music classified as non-mainstream 非主流, alternative 另類, underground 地下 and rock 搖滾. In the following, I will evaluate the explanatory value of these four principles of organization as compared to that of genre.

## §2 Rock as Pop’s Other

I tentatively define rock in China *ex negativo* as non-mainstream popular music. I will first explore how far this unusual approach takes us in the interpretation of rock discourse in the PRC. Secondly, I will consider the challenge that Second Hand Rose presents to this discourse. Finally, does this challenge feed into a coherent and discernible subgenre of sinified rock?

### Polarization in PRC Rock Discourse

Rock is often positioned as ‘original’ and ‘authentic’ vis-à-vis the mainstream. For instance, in *Like a Knife: Ideology and Genre in Contemporary Chinese Popular Music*, Andrew Jones distinguishes “two broadly defined genres: officially-sanctioned popular music (*tongsu yinyue*), and underground rock music.”<sup>18</sup> The gist of this pioneering study is that since “genre is a function of ideology, not musical style,” pop and rock both claim to give voice to the People, with pop appealing to hegemony, and rock to authenticity.<sup>19</sup> From the outset, this dichotomy favors rock discourse. *Like a Knife* performs what Jeroen de Kloet calls ‘the rock mythology’:

a set of narratives which produce rock as a distinct music world that is, first and foremost, authentic, but also subcultural, masculine, rebellious and (counter) political. ... It is the rock mythology ... supplying the glue that binds producers, musicians, and audiences together; it is the basis of the *production* of the rock culture.<sup>20</sup>

De Kloet warns against the uncritical reiteration of this mythology in Western journalistic, political and academic accounts of Chinese rock. Nonetheless, implicitly comparing rock to neo-Marxist notions of false consciousness as both deceptive and thoroughly en-

<sup>17</sup> On generation, see De Kloet 2010:17-25.

<sup>18</sup> Jones 1992:3.

<sup>19</sup> Jones 1992:20.

<sup>20</sup> De Kloet 2009: 26. Compare De Kloet 2001: 31-34.

meshed in praxis, he argues that the mythology produces rock culture in China as well.

### Freedom and Truth

Lu Lingtao and Li Yang's collage of answers by the first generation of rock musicians to the question 'What is rock?' attests to the centrality of the concepts of freedom 自由 and authenticity 真實 in rock music discourse in the PRC between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s. The reply of Second Hand Rose's first bass player Chen Jing is fairly representative:

I think it is a kind of explosion or embodiment of the self, and it is a true reflection of your own ability, your capability. It is just very authentic.<sup>21</sup>

After briefly mentioning the musical form, instruments, styles and precursors of rock, Xue Ji stresses freedom in the introduction of his 1993 book *Rock's Dreams Searching* 搖滾夢尋:

If you mention rock music, you can't avoid identifying its quality, which is the rock spirit. ... In philosophical terms, the rock spirit is the spirit of humanity's pursuit of the freedom of existence. In plain words, it is that which resists mass things through music, because following the masses means losing individuality, it means vulgarity 媚俗 and populism 流行. However if the rock spirit is simply understood as anger, as resisting the tradition, it ignores Chinese actuality 實際.<sup>22</sup>

The chapter on Chinese rock in Wang Yi's *Music in China at the End of the Century* 音樂在世紀末的中國 (1994) establishes the centrality of the rock spirit in Chinese dis-

Popular 流行	Traditional and Art 傳統暨藝術
Publishing 出版	
1 song 2 Mandarin album 3 Taiwanese album 4 Hakka album 5 Aboriginal album (music video)	(folk music album) (opera and narrative album) 26 traditional music album 27 classical music album 28 children's music album 29 religious music album 30 crossover music album
Personal 個人	
6 composer 7 lyricist 8 arranger 9 album producer 10 song producer 11 Mandarin male singer 12 Taiwanese male singer 13 Mandarin female singer 14 Taiwanese female singer 15 Hakka singer 16 Aboriginal singer 17 band 18 performing group 19 newcomer 20 music video director	31 composer 32 lyricist 33 arranger 34 producer 35 interpretation 詮釋 of traditional music 36 vocal rendition 37 instrumental rendition
Instrumental Rendition 演奏	
21 album 22 album producer 23 composer	
Special Mention 評審團	
24	38
Lifetime Contribution 特別貢獻	
25	39
<i>Illustration 2.3: Overview of the categories of the 19<sup>th</sup> Golden Melody Awards, held in Taipei in 2008. The categories between parentheses are those added at the 20<sup>th</sup> ceremony in 2009.</i>	

<sup>21</sup> Lu 2003: V.

<sup>22</sup> Xue 1993:i-ii. See also He Luping, in Xue 1993:192-206, and Jin 1989.

course, and its features of authenticity and freedom. Predating De Kloet's work and singling out Xue, Wang Yi argues against rock's "inflated myth of the rebellious spirit":

Rock had an important position in Chinese youth culture of the late 80s and the 90s – as it did in the West in the 60s. That is because 'rock music' was almost completely misunderstood to be a kind of spirit, and the music itself was almost relegated to being viewed as the packaging of 'the spirit.'<sup>23</sup>

Rather than centering around the conception of rock as a spirit or myth as opposed to a sound or style, these discussions, and hence the reception of rock, revolve around the desirability and effectiveness of protest music in the PRC, with assumptions regarding the critical function of rock in the West looming in the background.<sup>24</sup> The PRC's first rock star, Cui Jian, played a pivotal role in these discussions.

Cui Jian achieved success very suddenly, and in spite of lacking access to state media. In his inquiry into this phenomenon, *Cui Jian Screams From Inside Nothing-to-His-Name* 崔健在一無所有中吶喊, Zhao Jianwei reevaluates both Western philosophy and Chinese history. Zhao spends fifty pages arguing that the death of God, as declared by Nietzsche, left a vacuum that was filled by the American counterculture. He spends another twenty pages sketching the void left by the Cultural Revolution, and the inability of the popular mainstream to address this void. Everything leads up to Cui Jian's 1986 debut performance, which:

declared the beginning of a great cultural rebellion era 時代 led by music. ... it represented a rebellion against traditional culture and the pursuit of a humane and free spirit of the times.<sup>25</sup>

Zhao defines Cui Jian's music throughout as being about "freedom, authenticity and sexuality." He argues that rather than opposing Communism, Cui Jian is heeding Marx's call for realism.<sup>26</sup> Just like Andrew Jones' book of the same year, he mobilizes the lyrics of Cui Jian's song LIKE A KNIFE 像一把刀子 (1991):

Cui Jian says that Chinese rock is like a knife. Now he takes this knife up to cut one chunk of rotten flesh after another off China's body. The first chunk of dead meat is hypocrisy!<sup>27</sup>

But in 1993, Cui Jian sued Zhao Jianwei. He explained:

<sup>23</sup> Wang 1994:168-169. On Xue Ji, see Wang 1994:192.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Groenewegen 2005.

<sup>25</sup> Zhao 1994:245.

<sup>26</sup> Zhao 1994:287, 264-265.

<sup>27</sup> Zhao 1994: 274.

Zhao Jianwei is a theorist. He built this whole construct according to Western aesthetics. ... he has no right to pigeonhole me into the Chinese shadow of Western rock. It harms my image, and also that of us Chinese. Does our Chinese culture have no other option but to *copy* [English in original] others? ... If you just say that rock contains democratic, anti-traditional concepts, then that's only superficial form. ... Zhao Jianwei also didn't explain which tradition I oppose, he only says that I rebel against tradition. Why? Because Western rock is against tradition. ... I think my music is very simple, it opposes everything that makes people lose themselves, be it money, traditional concepts, the law or religion. This could even be rock itself ... maybe I don't know anything, but I know what I am opposed to. That is rock as I understand it. So when I saw this book's hypocrisy, I opposed it.

28

Cui Jian refuses to have his music reduced to a specific political agenda. Instead he presents it as socially engaged and liberating in a personal but politically unspecific way. This ambiguity also lies at the bottom of his idea that rock is culture rather than politics, voiced for instance in the book-length interview *Free Style* 自由風格 (2001).<sup>29</sup> However, the culture-versus-politics angle only fuels the argument of Zhao Jianwei, who puts forward that culture and politics are intricately entwined.<sup>30</sup> In short, in the face of Cui Jian's ambiguity, the majority of Chinese critics, and presumably audiences, regarded Cui Jian and rock in general as not only outside of the cultural and political mainstream, but also as challenging it.

## Western Sources

As the quotes above show, it has been a successful strategy in Chinese rock criticism to present a politicized rock spirit on the basis of Western philosophy and counterculture and then explain how this essence should be expressed in China. Most information about rock in the West that enabled this strategy was disseminated through magazines, by early translations such as that of Morris Dickstein's programmatic *The Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (1977, translated 1985) and later by comprehensive works such as Huang Liaoyuan's *Overview of World Rock* 世界搖滾大觀 (1993) and Hao Fang's *The Wild Blooming of Wounded Flowers: The Bondage and Struggle of Rock 'n' Roll* 花怒放: 搖滾的被縛與抗爭 (1993, republished 2003). *The Wild Blooming of Wounded Flowers* in particular presents Western rock as anti-mainstream. Each of its chapters investigates a defining aspect of rock, namely: (1) demanding freedom; (2) participating in revolution; (3) transcending ethics; (4) avoiding ideology; (5) opposing Western Art Music; (6) challenging national divisions; (7) promoting intense emotions; (8) opposing religion; and (9) revealing the limits of rationality.

<sup>28</sup> Xue 1993:5-6.

<sup>29</sup> Cui 2001:38-40, Cf. 214.

<sup>30</sup> Zhao 1994:9, 171.

In the course of the 1990s and especially the 2000s more recordings and information entered China, through conventional publications, ‘saw-cut’ albums (*dakou*) and the Internet. The diversification of the material resulted in the notion of the ‘rock spirit’ becoming obsolescent, as it became harder to claim underlying ideological coherence. Nevertheless, Iron Chang’s *Sounds and Fury* 聲音與憤怒 (Taiwan 2004, PRC 2008) and many other sources still present rock as inherently anti-mainstream.

## Underground

The publication of Hao Fang’s *Radiant Nirvana: The Life of Kurt Cobain* 燦爛涅槃：柯特科本的一生 (1997) roughly coincides with the proliferation of the term ‘Underground’ 地下 in the Chinese media. Yan Jun’s article “Welcome to the Underground” 歡迎你來地下 (1999) promotes the contrasting music of grunge band The Fly, noise rock band No (led by Zuoxiao Zuzhou), folk singer Hu Mage and DJ Chen Dili. The article begins:

Ever since Cui Jian, Chinese rock has been seen as an alternative 另類, outsider’s 異族 and Underground sound. From Overload’s speed metal to Zhang Chu’s new folk, and even the new punk that has recently emerged: all are caught under the deliberately vague umbrella of “new music,” which serves to distinguish them from the worn-out rut of commercial love songs and [CCTV New Year’s] Gala songs. Moreover, for more than a year now the concept of Underground music has been heralded. People have taken almost everything that has not been absorbed by the commercial system or acknowledged by the mainstream rock system, and labeled it Underground. Its cultural significance exceeds the evaluation and classification 分型 of music itself. In these years of rock resuscitation, Underground has become a synonym for idealist, creative and extraordinary 異質 culture.<sup>31</sup>

Yan Jun himself was central in the heralding of the Underground, warning his readers against the co-opting of rock as an exciting symbol of rebelliousness.<sup>32</sup> However, the strongest evidence of rock as the anti-mainstream is *The Declaration of Shucun* 樹村聲明. The document, directed against the film *Beijing Rocks* 北京樂與路 (2001, d. Mabel Cheung), was drafted by Yan Jun and signed by most Beijing-based bands:

In our music, lyrics, behavior and attitude in life we have consistently protested against the harm commercial and mainstream culture inflicts on society and individuals. Therefore we see no reason to join in activities that would be self-contradictory ... The greatest joy of living and making music is striving to get as much

<sup>31</sup> Yan 2006a:318-319, Yan 2002:142-143.

<sup>32</sup> Conversation, Yan Jun, Beijing, 9 May 2004. Cf. Groenewegen 2005:48. Yan 2004:169-173.

freedom as you can, especially freedom of thought and spirit.<sup>33</sup>

### The Middle Ground of Second Hand Rose

Whereas Iron Chang answers his book's subtitle *Can Rock & Roll Change the World?* with a strong affirmative, Second Hand Rose's breakthrough in 2001 popularized the following sentence:

Big brother, so you play rock but what's the use?

大哥你玩搖滾，你玩它有啥用啊

Sung in Northeastern countryside dialect, the phrase portrays a stereotypical reaction of China's masses to the rock scene. The album *Second Hand Rose* 二手玫瑰 (2003) starts with the sound of a bustling audience and the announcement, "Please go inside, the show is about to begin," after which Liang Long sings this sentence and the heavy rock intro plus suona of the opening song *TRICK* 伎倆 kick in. This framing suggests that rock is already always entertainment. The novelty of Second Hand Rose lies in their ridiculing of the somewhat pretentious Underground ideology that dominated the Beijing rock scene at the time. The lyrics of the song elaborate this:

究竟搖滾是累壞你的身子兒呀  
還是累壞了你這個人兒呀  
看那愛情象個瞎子兒  
它必須找到位置說話

In the end, is rock wiping you out,  
or is it wiping you clean away?  
See, love is like a blind man.  
It has to find a place to speak from.

看來你是真的學會賣弄了  
要不怎么那么着人的喜歡  
可是你還是成了一個啞巴  
神神叨叨說着一些廢話

Sure you've learnt to show off.  
Why else does everyone love you?  
But you've lost your ear, your voice,  
stuttering strange nonsense.

究竟是成不了個有情的婊子  
還是裝不明白個有情的戲子

In the end, do you fail as love's whore  
or as an actor that can't play love?

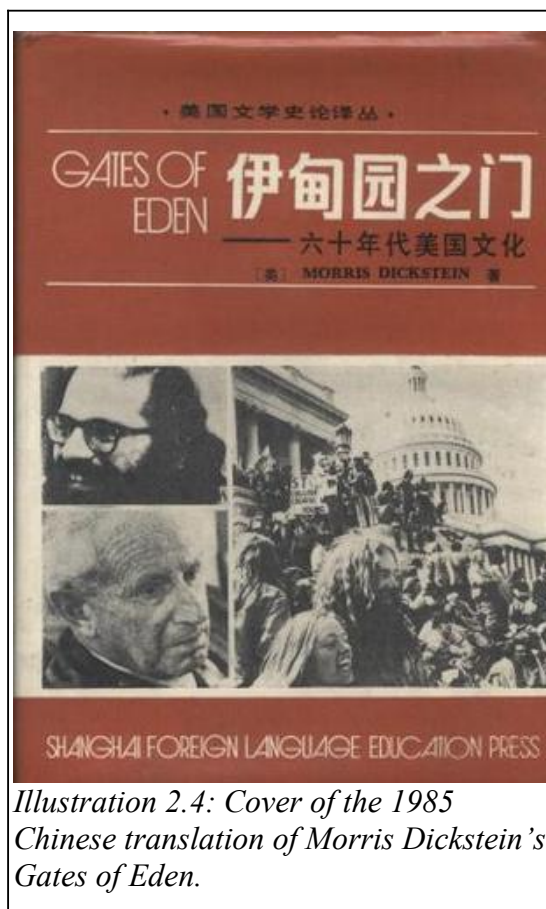


Illustration 2.4: Cover of the 1985 Chinese translation of Morris Dickstein's *Gates of Eden*.

<sup>33</sup> Yan 2002:258-261, full translation in Groenewegen 2005:152-154, discussion 76-78.

只是理想咋突然那么沒勁      Big ideals are so lame in the end.  
看着你我也再說不出什么詞兒      Looking at you, I can't say another word.

Rock's ideals, love, and by extension its rebelliousness, are tricks that are defined and confined by the position it speaks from, namely the stage, entertainment and the media. TRICK cuts through the hypocrisy of overemphasizing rock's political potential, as well as its anti-mainstream attitudes. Liang Long explains:

Liang Long: "I hate it when people call us an Underground band. In my book there's no distinction between under and above ground, I call them all rock music."<sup>34</sup>

Liang Long: "I think it is a big mistake of artists to always treat commerce as alien to it. Commerce didn't do it any harm. Without commerce there's no Dali or Beethoven. Rock music and artists should stop boycotting commerce and start considering how to join forces with it. ... To me rock has already ceased to be a subtext 潛台詞. It's not like when I first heard Cui Jian and I thought that that was what rock was, or when I thought that Tang Dynasty was what rock should be. I have been involved [with music] myself for such a long time now that these ideas have faded. As to what rock is, I think it is an attitude. But I think that, regardless of rock or something else, the one thing that must be there is a sense of responsibility. You can do anything, but you must have a sense of responsibility, either to society or to the People around you. That's most important."

Interviewer: "This is your interpretation of the rock spirit?"

Liang Long: "Yes, it's a kind of responsibility. When you discover serious problems, you need to articulate them. Because we are artists, we can only raise questions."<sup>35</sup>

Rather than proving that rock and pop exist next to each other as distinct articulated forms, Second Hand Rose transforms the pop-rock divide into a gradual scale of marketability, which they attempted to climb.

## Challenging the Underground

The rock mythology's anti-commercialism is unhelpful for record company owners. It was questioned throughout the 1990s by people such as Huang Liaoyuan and Shen Lihui, owner of the independent record company Modern Sky and lead singer of the band Sober. Although I agree with De Kloet that the sound and image of bands such as Sober

<sup>34</sup> Guo 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Guo 2003, amended on the basis of Dong 2005.

and New Pants started to move away from rock pretentiousness in the late 1990s, Second Hand Rose was the first to challenge the rock mythology head-on.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout the 1990s, rock performances were less clearly opposed to the dominant economic and political powers than rock discourse of the same period suggests. Medium-marketable bands such as Tang Dynasty, Brain Failure, New Pants, Sober, Muma and Xie Tianxiao performed songs with themes of indignation, anger, disillusion and hedonism without becoming politically outspoken. Tang Dynasty had a nationalist streak, yet this was not perceived to be in conflict with the rock mythology. Nor were the hedonism of Brain Failure and later Joyside understood as undermining the seriousness of rock. They were seen as pursuing freedom and truth, in contrast to mainstream music.<sup>37</sup>

Second Hand Rose's 2003 show in the state-owned Beijing Exhibition Center, where they also launched a wine in their name, and their signing to the commercial label Music Nation in 2006, put them clearly at odds with the Underground ideology. Historically, the success of Second Hand Rose marked the demise of the rock mythology. In 2004 the most influential Underground metal band Tongue fell apart. It was several years before their protégés Miserable Faith, famous for angry rap metal and their 2001 slogan "wherever there is oppression there is resistance," made a comeback with the ballad *THE MOST BEAUTIFUL DAY OF MY LIFE* 生命中最美麗的一天 (2006) and the reggae album *Don't Stop My Music* 不要停止我的音樂 (2008).

## Social Engagement

Second Hand Rose first rendered it ideologically defensible for rock bands to cooperate with commerce and claim social relevance at the same time. Their implicit call to bring rock back to the People is partly motivated by the emphasis on social awareness in the rock mythology. Liang Long:

Second Hand Rose is still critical. I believe that the basic quality of rock is to be responsible towards society and critical towards reality. If a band is not critical, they are no longer rock. They could be representative of another style.<sup>38</sup>

This continuity is also evidenced by support from heavyweights on the Beijing rock scene (see Chapter 1). Additionally, Second Hand Rose perform mostly in non-mainstream venues and festivals – for instance, annually at New Get Lucky to express gratitude for their debut there.

Second Hand Rose's frequent references to the PRC's political legacy also serve as a reminder that politics and the masses are interdependent. For instance, the lyrics of *ALLOW SOME ARTISTS TO GET RICH FIRST* criticize the economic inequality that resulted from Deng Xiaoping's Open Door policy:

<sup>36</sup> De Kloet 2001:97. Cf. Wang 2007:220.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. De Kloet 2010:54-68.

<sup>38</sup> Li 2009.

我是一盒名牌的香煙	I am a box of brand incense.
我被塞進了窮人的口袋	I am trapped in a poor man's pocket.
我是一只貪婪的耗子	I am a greedy rat.
我被富人收養起來（來）	I am raised by the wealthy.
我是一盒治性病的藥	I am a box of medicine for clap.
我被愛人偷偷打開	I am secretly opened by lovers.
我是一個犯了戒的神仙	I am an immortal who violated a commandment.
我被老天踢了下來	I am being kicked out of heaven.
一群豬啊飛上了天	A group of pigs fly up to heaven,
一群海盜淹死在沙灘	a band of robbers drown on the beach.
我的兒子被做成了金錢	My son has been turned into money,
搖曳的花枯萎在河岸	freely swaying flowers wither by the riverside.

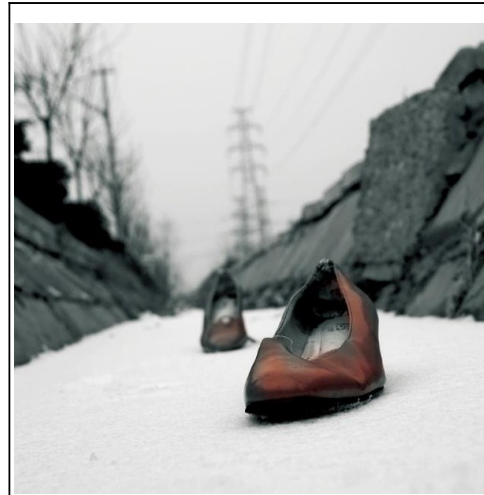
The song criticizes a political system that bestows status and wealth on pigs, whereas humans are changed into financial resources. They are forced to struggle to make a living, with both happiness (flowers) and freedom (Buddhist enlightenment found in reaching the other shore) remaining out of reach.

The critique of the absurd distribution of wealth made in *ALLOW SOME ARTISTS TO GET RICH FIRST* is further developed in *UNOFFICIAL HISTORY 野史* (2009). It narrates the sad faith of Brother Four, who overhears two righteous teachers and jumps into a wide river. If we assume that the two teachers are Capitalism and Communism and that this story takes place in the PRC of the late 1980s, Brother Four's leap into the river heeds the call to "go to sea" 下海, i.e. to go into business, even though Brother Four "can't swim." Musically, *UNOFFICIAL HISTORY* alternates between relaxing verses with a playful syncopated riff and a slow reggae beat on the one hand, and frantic choruses in double time with sounds of breaking glass, maddening wind instruments and raw, punk vocal delivery, on the other. After a klaxon-like dubbed suona solo, the song continues its relaxing pace:

這個史他就剩下四兒了	This history leaves Four behind.
那個史他就剩個六兒了	That history leaves a certain Six.
他們就在水的一方	They are on the other side of the water,
舉起了碧血洗的銀槍	raising silver guns washed in blood justly shed.
啪的一聲槍打響了	Bang! A shot rings out.
四兒的身子隨着隨着河水趟了	Four's body floats on the river, on the river.
他認為總得有人活着	He assumes there will be survivors in the end.
秘密就在他褲襠里永遠睡了	The secret sleeps forever in his trouser legs.

Although Brother Four could be a casualty of economic reform, I propose an alternative reading triggered by the numbers six and four. In China these numbers signify June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1989, and the massacre that took place that night around Tian'anmen Square. But even taking the song in the most general sense, it asks us not to forget the human beings who were sacrificed for the current peace, freedom and prosperity. As such, it highlights Second Hand Rose's social engagement. After the music ends, we hear a stock phrase from martial arts novels:

不忘四哥恩情      Don't forget Brother Four's  
                                 kindness!



*Illustration 2.5: Cover of Second Hand Rose's 2009 EP Lover 情兒, which includes UNOFFICIAL HISTORY.*

## Sinified Rock as a Genre

In "Rock Aesthetics and Musics of the World" (1997), Motti Regev argues that local musicians participate in two Bourdieuan fields: that of global pop-rock music, structured around authenticity; and that of ethno-national identity, structured around the nation. "Making local rock music 'solves' the apparent contradiction of participation in both these fields."<sup>39</sup> In many parts of the world these local rock musics have developed into successful genres, sometimes gaining recognition outside their ethno-national locus of origin.

Sinified rock would be the corresponding genre in the PRC, as it similarly appeals to local youths by situating itself between rock and pop, and between global trends and rapidly modernizing local traditions. However, 'sinified rock' is also my etic term to address the connections between Cui Jian, Tang Dynasty, The Master Says, Second Hand Rose and others. In Chinese rock discourse, this lineage is noted but never developed into a unifying narrative, let alone articulated as a distinct position in the field. Why isn't sinified rock a genre?

Firstly, it is worth noting that identifying the 'absence' of a genre may reflect a Western inclination to project prefabricated notions of genre and categorization onto China. Although Regev stresses that communities are active hybridizers rather than passive recipients, he also posits Anglo-American rock as the source that has prompted local communities to articulate new identities and challenge older ones. Even if this is true – the Anglo-American influence is huge – such an approach obstructs understanding 'local'

<sup>39</sup> Regev 1997:2.

musics as anything other than peripheries of the center. Is sinified rock really firstly rock and secondly Chinese?

The notion of folk or national rock 民族搖滾 introduced by Second Hand Rose is closer than any other Chinese term to what I have dubbed ‘sinified rock.’ Although at face value it foregrounds ethnicity (as opposed to cosmopolitanism) rather than Chineseness (as opposed to other nations), it is clear that ‘national rock’ means ‘Chinese national rock’ in this context. More importantly, the term did not extend to other bands, even in the PRC. The weak cohesive potential of terms such as ‘sinified rock’ and ‘national folk’ across geographic, generational and other differences partly stems from the fact that bands which explicitly refer to their Chineseness nonetheless take inspiration from very different foreign genres: Tang Dynasty from heavy metal, The Master Says from funk, and Bu Yi from blues, to name a few. But the largest obstacle to genre articulation is geographical affiliation. Cui Jian was first associated with Northwest Wind, which itself was a short-lived form of locally defined ethno-national pop-rock. Tang Dynasty, The Master Says, Ear Slap, South City Johns, Madman and Hao Yun take pride in their Beijing provenance. Other potential sinified rock bands organize their collective efforts, such as compilation albums, along regional affinities. *One and Only Ningxia* 只有一個寧夏 (2005) contains songs by Su Yang, Bu Yi and Zhao Laoda. *A Tale of Two Cities* 雙城樂記 (2007) brings musicians from Hong Kong and Guangzhou together. *Underground Chengdu* 地下成都 1, 2 and 3 (2000, 2001 and 2004), Wuhan’s *Desert Travel* 荒漠旅行 (2004), and *Underground Shanghai* 地下上海 (2000) establish local scenes outside the rock capital Beijing and its traditions.

Second Hand Rose is the only sinified rock band with Northeast Chinese affiliations, on which Liang Long commented in 2009:

We also can’t be influenced by others, because Second Hand Rose has been very lonely all along. Many bands can perform together. We don’t know who with.<sup>40</sup>

There have been several moments that could have broken this isolation by articulating sinified rock as a genre. I will discuss a compilation album, a commemorative festival and a record label.

Liang Long spent most of 2008 organizing and recording a sampler with cover songs from two 1980s television adaptations of classical novels, *A Dream of Red Mansions* 紅樓夢 and *Journey to the West* 西遊記. Liang explains that the composers who worked on these series were still relatively untainted by Western popular music and had thus created popular tunes that were close to the Chinese musical tradition.<sup>41</sup> As a continuation of this tradition, *You in a Red Chamber, I Journey West* 你在紅樓我在西游 presented an ideal opportunity for Liang to bring artists together under the banner of national or sinified rock. However, the sampler contains no songs by Cui Jian, The Master Says,

<sup>40</sup> Li 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Conversation, Liang Long 2008.

Xie Tianxiao, Ear Slap, Hao Yun or Madman. Instead, Liang Long's choices seemed to be motivated by marketability, generation, gender and geographic regions. Next to artists of his own generation who stress Chineseness, such as Su Yang and Wan Xiaoli, the album also includes songs by the electropop outfit Yu Fei Men (female voice) and rap metal bands such as Miserable Faith and Liquid Oxygen Can. The latter is led by a singer from Northeast China.

The outdoor festival Radiant Road of Chinese Rock 中國搖滾的光輝道路, held in Ningxia in August 2004, presented an overview of four generations of Chinese rock. Ignoring the rock mythology, organizer Huang Liaoyuan invited only medium-marketable bands, many of which used Chinese sounds and instruments. They included first-generation bands, such as Cui Jian and Wang Yong; second-generation bands, such as Tang Dynasty and Zhang Chu; third-generation bands, such as The Master Says and Zuoxiao Zuzhou; and fourth-generation bands, such as Bu Yi, Su Yang and Second Hand Rose. Because some of the bands hadn't performed in years, let alone recorded any new material, the festival's importance lay primarily in its commemoration and historical consciousness. The Radiant Road of Chinese Rock remained an isolated event.

The independent label 13<sup>th</sup> Month specializes in music that I would group under sinified rock, publishing albums of Xie Tianxiao, Su Yang, Ma Tiao, Wan Xiaoli, Shan Ren and others. After its establishment in 2006, 13<sup>th</sup> Month lobbied for the creation of the category of 'best folk artist' at the 7<sup>th</sup> Sinophone Music and Media Event 華語音樂傳媒大賞. The inaugural award went to Wan Xiaoli at the ceremony in Hong Kong in July 2007.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, CEO Lu Zhongqiang states his commitment to medium-marketable sinified rock with promotional slogans such as "the more Chinese, the more fashionable" 越中國越時尚. However, rather than using 'national rock', 'sinified rock' or a similar term, 13<sup>th</sup> Month describes itself as promoting "groundbreaking" music. Genre labels are restricted to honorary titles, for instance Xie Tianxiao as "the new godfather of Chinese rock" (after Cui Jian) and Wan Xiaoli as a "subversive folktune singer" 顛覆民謠的歌手.

In the end, I cannot explain why no genre such as sinified rock has emerged. The compilation album *You in a Red Chamber, I Journey West*, The Radiant Road of Chinese Rock festival and the label 13<sup>th</sup> Month offer starting points for the articulation of the obvious connections between these bands. However, these connections seem to be less obvious within Chinese popular music. Thorough considerations of the late 1990s Beijing punk scene centering around Scream Bar and Scream Records, and of the new wave scene that has emerged around D-22 and Maybe Mars since 2005, would show a similar weakness of the binding power of genre in China. Sinified rock bands are unable to join forces within North China. They are unable to jump on the bandwagon of, or to offer an alternative to, the Chinese Wind, launched by the über-marketable Taiwanese pop star Jay Chou.

<sup>42</sup> Conversation, Zhang Ran, October 2008.

### §3 Pop and its Fringes

Genre in Chinese popular music may be a surplus effect of the interplay of language-geography-ethnicity, generation, gender and marketability dimensions on the one hand, and the process of foreign cultural forms adapting to Chinese popular music, on the other. Whereas I focused above on articulations of genre in low to medium-marketable Northern Chinese male-dominated rock bands, I will now discuss them in relation to medium to high-marketable female pop singers based in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore.

Iron Chang and many others compare mainstream music to a broad river that draws on the creative energy of a large river basin, one that includes foreign and subterranean sources.<sup>43</sup> Rather than stressing derivativeness, I propose a more positive interpretation of this trope by foregrounding popular music's success in seeking out, promoting and organizing new musical developments. In other words, the mainstream doesn't only absorb, it also throws distinctions into relief and hence contributes to articulation. Before turning to the careers of female singer-songwriters in the early 2000s, I will discuss Faye Wong's position in the nexus between several potential genres. How do genre co-optation and articulation interact in Chinese pop?

#### *Gangtai* as a Genre

Nimrod Baranovitch calls Faye Wong both a "Hong Kong female rocker" and a "*gangtai* singer."<sup>44</sup> But is the term *gangtai* sufficiently coherent to define Wong's genre identity?

Firstly, it must be acknowledged that *gangtai* music is quite coherent enough to be emulated outside its name-giving regions of Hong Kong and Taiwan. From there it has traveled to, say, Urumqi and Vancouver. Baranovitch defines it:

[Teresa Teng's] singing, considered the ideal in *gangtai* music at that time [early 1980s PRC] was soft, sweet, often whispery and restrained. The sweet flavor of her voice was enhanced by gentle vibratos, coquettish nasal slides, and a moderate, relaxed tempo. Most of her songs were based on Western harmonies, while the melodies often retained the traditional Chinese pentatonism. ... A Western influence manifested itself in many *gangtai* songs also in the use of Western popular dance rhythms. ... *gangtai* music of the 1970s descended from pre-1949 *liuxing* [pop] music.<sup>45</sup>

Secondly, *gangtai* is distinct from other popular musics, such as the invigorating songs for the masses 大眾歌曲 that dominated the PRC in the 1950s to 1970s and the *tongsu* 通俗 'officially-sanctioned popular' music that built on that tradition in the 1980s.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Chang 2008:26.

<sup>44</sup> Baranovitch 2003:220, 228.

<sup>45</sup> Baranovitch 2003:11.

<sup>46</sup> Jones 1992:17-20.

Thirdly, this distinction has social connotations, with *gangtai* articulating the desire of a young, urban generation for romance and freedom – as it did particularly in the PRC of the 1980s. That Teresa Teng was censored in 1983 illustrates that the CCP was aware of this connection. Furthermore, the opposition between *gangtai* and *tongsu* goes back to ‘decadent’ 1930s Shanghai popular music, which gives *gangtai* a similar historical background to fully articulated East Asian popular music genres such as South Korean *trot* 트로트 and Japanese *enka* 演歌.

However, this distinction lost its relevance in the mid-1980s, when *gangtai*’s slow tempi and personalized vocal delivery became synonymous with contemporary mainstream pop. Today, the *shuqing* 抒情 ‘lyrical’ songs of *gangtai* define mainstream popular music to the extent that there is no constitutive outside: the mainstream does not divide itself into genres or define itself vis-à-vis any external musical discourse, such as mass music or hip-hop.<sup>47</sup> For instance, in order to present 1930s Shanghai pop as a genre, Szu-wei Chen contrasts it with contemporary pop music. His article “The Rise and Generic Features of Shanghai Popular Songs in the 1930s and 1940s” employs Fabbri’s genre rules to describe what essentially is all pop music of that particular time and place.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in the 2000s, albums of superstars like Jay Chou are carefully planned to contain ‘slow songs’ 慢歌 and ‘quick songs’ 快歌, and more generally to encompass a wide range of potential genres, including hip-hop, country & western, Latin and the Chinese Wind. Although albums may be packaged around genre-related imagery, such as the cowboy on Jay Chou’s *On the Run* 我很忙 (2007), the genre in question is rarely manifest in more than two songs out of the ten an album usually contains. Mainstream pop stars and aspiring artists rarely record albums in a single genre, let alone base their career on them.

Above all else, the co-optation of genre dissolves links of articulation. Basile Zimmermann argues that DJs and electronic artists in the PRC are guided by the presets of their instruments, which are habitually labeled according to genre.<sup>49</sup> The lists of digital samples, rhythms and sound effects thus produced dissociate genres from ideological, cultural and historical components and render them interchangeable and combinable. This is not only salient in the



Illustration 2.6: Steinberg Groove Agent 2.

<sup>47</sup> Moskowitz 2010:3.

<sup>48</sup> Chen 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Zimmerman 2006:234-238, 283.

limitedly marketable music Zimmermann describes, but also in the Chinese mainstream. Pop producer Tan Yizhe, for instance, stresses that a producer should know and be able to play the basics of different genres, yet he rarely creates faithful genre songs.<sup>50</sup> Sitting in the studio with Tan while he asked a pop singer to shout the typical punk exclamation ‘oi’ a number of times over the final chorus of a pop song, I couldn’t help thinking of Zimmerman’s example of the Steinberg Groove Agent (see Illustration 2.6). Being the clichéd example of an articulated genre – hardened, distinctive and subcultural – punk ‘melted’ and was transformed into an ornamental sound effect.

### Faye Wong’s Ballads

Before moving on to Faye Wong’s genre-transgressing fringe pop, I want to attest to the centrality of the *gangtai* sound to her music. Wong’s greatest hits are ballads, such as her Cantonese breakthrough song *EASILY HURT WOMAN* (1992) and her Mandarin breakthrough song *I AM WILLING* 我願意 (1994APR). Later, *SKY* (1994JUN), *UNDERCURRENT* 暗涌 (1997FEB) and especially *APPOINTMENT* 約定 (1997SEPT) and *RED BEANS* 紅豆 (1998) became popular ballads. From *RED BEANS*:

還沒好好的感受 雪花綻放的氣候 我們一起顫抖 會更明白 甚麼是溫柔	Still without grasping the climate of blossoming snowflakes, we’ll shiver together and understand what warmth is.
還沒跟你牽著手 走過荒蕪的沙丘 可能從此以後 學會珍惜 天長和地久	Still haven’t held your hand and walked desolate dunes. Perhaps from now on I’ve learn to cherish how far heaven and earth reach.
有時候 有時候 我會相信一切有盡頭 相聚離開 都有時候 沒有甚麼會永垂不朽 可是我 有時候 寧願選擇留戀不放手 等到風景都看透 也許你會陪我 看細水長流	Sometimes... sometimes... I believe everything comes to an end, meeting and parting, everything has its time. Nothing remains stainless forever. But I... sometimes... rather linger than let go, waiting for us to see through the scenery. maybe then you’ll come and watch how droplets become a river.
還沒為你把紅豆 熬成纏綿的傷口	Still haven’t cooked for you, simmering red beans into lingering wounds

<sup>50</sup> Tan Yizhe, conversation 2008.

然後一起分享                      to share them together  
 會更明白              相思的哀愁      and understand    lovesickness.

還沒好好的感受                      Still without grasping  
 醒著親吻的溫柔                      the gentle warmth of a wake-up kiss...  
 可能在我左右                      Perhaps it's only around me  
 你才追求              孤獨的自由      that you pursue    desolate freedom.

Both APPOINTMENT and RED BEANS have meandering melodies that remain within a moderate vocal range. There's also a near-constant focus on this prosaic, single vocal melody, which is at first accompanied only by a few piano notes. Backing vocals only dub the main melody, if at all. Strings, as well as the percussion that enters either simultaneous with or immediately after the first chorus, mainly serve to drive the song to a climax, which coincides with the rising melody. Typically there is also a coda after the finale to the almost *a capella* first verse, securing the overarching centrality of the individual voice.

All of these elements set APPOINTMENT and RED BEANS apart from Wong's fringe pop songs and render them extremely suitable for karaoke. Additionally, APPOINTMENT was also recorded by Jacky Cheung, Jeff Chang and Where Chou, and RED BEANS by Jay Chou, Deserts Chang, Fish Leong, Ronald Cheng, Tanya Chua and Khalil Fong, among others. The continued popularity of the ballad in Chinese popular music most likely relates to karaoke and to listening habits that stress singability rather than danceability.

## Faye Wong's Fringe Pop

Although Baranovitch called Faye Wong a "Hong Kong female rocker," he can't possibly see her as a proponent of Chinese rock, because he argues that Chinese rock was a fad that declined just when Faye Wong rose to fame.<sup>51</sup> The classification merely suggests that Wong is not your average pop idol. To account for Faye Wong's alternative sound and cool image without blurring potential genres, I will call that side of her music 'fringe pop.'

In contrast to the ballads, which are slow to the point that rubato goes almost unnoticed, most of Faye Wong's songs have a clear groove, which in the beginning of Wong's career was often inspired by soul, and after 1994 increasingly by British alternative rock, integrating electronic and triphop influences towards the new millennium. Rather than the genre-defying nature of Faye Wong's "chop-suey" musical experience per se, I am interested in the uneven process of co-optation and articulation.

In tracing the sources of Wong's fringe pop, her covers of the Cranberries and her cooperation with Cocteau Twins stand out.<sup>52</sup> Whereas *Random Thought* contains a num-

<sup>51</sup> Baranovitch 2003:36-48.

<sup>52</sup> This started with two Cocteau Twins covers on *Random Thinking* 胡思亂想 (1994NOV): BLUEBEARD (the title track) and KNOW THYSELF AND EACH OTHER 知己知彼, from the Cocteau Twins' KNOW WHO YOU ARE AT EVERY

ber of ballads and pop rock songs, *Di-dar* (1995DEC) has a decidedly alternative rock sound, including the trademark high nasal ornaments of these Irish and Scottish female voices. This trend continued on the next album, *Impatience* (1996), for which Cocteau Twins composed the songs *FRACTURE* 分裂 and *REPRESSING HAPPINESS* 掃興 – songs they later recorded themselves as *TRANQUIL EYE* and *TOUCH UPON TOUCH* respectively. Faye Wong composed the rest of the songs on this album herself, and she continued to work with Cocteau Twins on later albums.<sup>53</sup>

In roughly the same period, Faye Wong got involved with the rock scene in her native Beijing. This resulted in personal contacts that turned into musical collaborations. Her then-husband Dou Wei composed and arranged songs on *Sky*, *Di-dar* and *Impatience*, and producer Zhang Yadong introduced electronic and triphop influences reminiscent of Björk, Portishead and Dido to her sound. Faye Wong offered these and other Beijing musicians one of very few opportunities to access the mainstream.

Faye Wong's relationship with the media adds to her fringe or alternative sound-image-text. In 1995 or 1996 she was photographed in her pajamas and with disheveled hair in a Beijing alley while she was on her way to empty a chamber pot. The photographer had interviewed the couple the day before, but had returned to play paparazzo. Wikipedia:

This photo caused a stir in the HK entertainment industry in whose eyes the contrast between her diva status in Hong Kong and a life in a small, shabby, less than sanitary house in Beijing was quite astonishing. Many from then on saw Wong as a woman who would sacrifice anything for love.<sup>54</sup>

The incident was detrimental to Faye Wong's already poor relationship with the entertainment media. In general, rather than the beautiful girl next door, Wong is enigmatic, taciturn and somewhat distant. She is reserved and notoriously difficult to interview. Whereas Teresa Teng hosted TV shows and Leslie Cheung's live shows contained dance routines and lengthy monologues, Faye Wong sings alone on stage, limiting interaction with the audience to the minimum of a few words of welcome and shaking the hands of fans in the first rows during the last song of a concert (after 1997, usually *AMONG PEOPLE* 人間, as live recordings suggest).

In the autobiographical rap in *EXIT* 出路 (1994DEC), Faye Wong sings: "I hate being a star but like to be noticed." Ironically, she performed the song at the 1994 Jade Solid Gold Songs Hong Kong 勁歌金曲香港 after receiving the award for most favored

AGE. Wong also covered Tori Amos' *SILENT ALL THOSE YEARS AS COLD WAR* 冷戰 (1993SEPT), the Cranberries' *DREAMS* in Mandarin as *BREAK AWAY* 掙脫 (1994JUNE) and in Cantonese as *DREAM PERSON* 夢中人 (1994NOV, cf. *Chungking Express*).

<sup>53</sup> She also sang a duet with Elizabeth Fraser which came out on Cocteau Twins' *Milk & Kisses* (1996). Finally Wong included the co-written song *AMUSEMENT PARK* 娛樂場, and *NOSTALGIA* 懷念懷, a cover of *RILKEAN HEART*, on her 1997 album.

<sup>54</sup> Wikipedia 2010. Cf. Huang 2005:99-101.



*Illustration 2.7: Faye Wong singing EXIT at the 1994 Jade Solid Gold Songs Hong Kong. The lyrics read “I often offend people.”*

female pop star. Her short, fading pink hair and baggy black sweater, as well as the scarcity of her words of gratitude, further contrasted her with the Hong Kong-style glamor that dominated the event.

Whereas between 1994 and 1997 most fringe pop songs were in Cocteau Twins’ alternative rock style, in the late 1990s Wong’s music included more electronic and triphop influences, and in general sounded less alternative and more marketable. In this period Wong also recorded up-beat house, trance, Latin and bombastic rock songs.<sup>55</sup> The bombastic rock songs have appeared on almost every album since 1997 and are recognizable by Wong’s high-pitched voice over distorted guitars, heavy

drums, elaborate string sections and electronic sound effects. *HEADING FOR TUMI 開到荼靡* (1999) illustrates the aloofness of these songs:<sup>56</sup>

每只螞蟻都有眼睛鼻子  
它美不美麗  
偏差有沒有一毫釐有何關係  
每一個人傷心了就哭泣  
餓了就要吃  
相差大不過天地有何刺激

Every ant has eyes and a nose.  
Aren’t they beautiful?  
Do they ever deviate one tiny bit? Why bother?  
Every human cries when hurt,  
needs food when hungry...  
These differences aren’t earth-shattering,  
what’s the thrill?

有太多太多魔力太少道理  
太多太多遊戲只是為了好奇  
還有什麼值得歇斯底里  
對什麼東西死心塌地

There’s so much much delusion and so little sense,  
so many many games played only out of curiosity.  
Does anything still deserve hysteria?  
What’s left to put your life on the line for?

一個一個偶像都不外如此  
沉迷過的偶像一個個消失  
誰曾傷天害理誰又是上帝  
我們在等待什麼奇跡  
最后剩下自己舍不得挑剔  
最后對着自己也不大看得起

Not a single idol is an exception.  
Once-enticing idols disappear one by one.  
Those who offended divine reason are now gods.  
What miracle are we waiting for?  
After all, left alone, they can’t help nitpicking.  
After all, they don’t even like themselves very much.

<sup>55</sup> E.g. house in *CHILD 童* (1998) and *EXCEL 精彩* (1999), trance in *A BIBLE FOR TWO 兩個人的神經* (2001) and *NIGHT OUTFIT 夜妝* (2003), and Latin in *SMOKE 烟* (2003), as well as a number of remixes. Rock songs include *BORED 悶* (1997SEPT), *HEADING FOR TUMI 開到荼靡* (1999), *A HUNDRED YEARS OF LONELINESS 百年孤獨* (1999), *GOODBYE, FIREFLY 再見螢火蟲* (2000), *THE WINGS OF LIGHT 光之翼* (2001), *IDIOTS 白痴* (2001) and *TO LOVE 將愛* (2003).

<sup>56</sup> *Tumi* ‘roseleaf raspberry,’ literally: ‘bitter-edible.’ The liner notes explain it as “the last flower of the flower season.”

誰給我全世界 我都會懷疑 心花怒放 卻開到荼蘼	I doubt whoever promises me the world. Thought blossoms violently but heads for the tumi.
一個一個一個人誰比誰美麗 一個一個一個人誰比誰甜蜜 一個一個一個人誰比誰容易 又有什么了不起	One by one by one—who's the prettiest? One by one by one—who's the sweetest? One by one by one—who's the easiest? And what's so amazing about that?
每只螞蟻和誰擦身而過 都那麼整齊 有何關係 每一個人碰見所愛的人 卻心有余悸	Every ant who it brushes up against it's all sorted out —what does it matter? Every person runs into someone she loves but still fears...

C. Y. Kong's string arrangements in the bridge are compelling, and the use of a light distortion on Wong's voice in the verse, reproduced live by using a megaphone, adds to the sense of urgency. The final verse ends halfway, inviting the listener to articulate the next logical step – to ignore gossip and stop fussing over other people's private lives.

In “An Alternative Faye Wong?” 另類的王菲? (2002), Pan Wei argues that because Wong's first steps towards a more alternative sound and image resulted in media attention and record sales, the record company Cinepoly supported her move in this direction, which triggered a process that ultimately led to the low-marketable sound of *Impatience*. However, Pan also argues that even the alternative sound of *Impatience* is still highly marketable, because it is based on (1) Romanticism, namely the uncompromising pursuit of love, in both the music and accounts of Faye Wong's private life; (2) a carefree and indifferent attitude towards everything else in life; and (3) addressing the alienation of modern urbanity.

Although I agree with Pan Wei that Wong's music and image differ from what is generally understood by rock in China, I take issue with his uncritical reiteration of the rock mythology. After appealing to the rock spirit, Pan writes: “I never listened to [Cui Jian's] NOTHING TO MY NAME as a love song.” Precisely these reiterations of the rock mythology, of which Li Wan's “Seeing Through Faye Wong” 看透王菲 is another example, prevent the articulation of rock into a genre with a mainstream component.<sup>57</sup>

In conclusion, I argue that Faye Wong introduced coolness, authenticity and originality into mainstream Chinese pop music. Moreover, these elements were not co-opted completely and thus contributed to Wong's commercially successful distinctiveness. In other words, these elements suggested the viability of an alternative musical discourse. Even though Wong did not develop them into a coherent genre, she paved the way for the female singer-songwriters of the early 2000s.

<sup>57</sup> Pan 2002. Cf. Fung 2002. Li 2001:252-258.

## Singer-songwriters

Since 2000, mainstream Chinese popular music has seen a number of overlapping trends. Almost simultaneous with the appearance of boy- and girlbands such as F4, S.H.E., and Twins came the R&B of Wang Leehom, David Tao and Jay Chou. Then, after Jay Chou's Chinese Wind caught on around 2003, the first *Idols* TV shows became a huge hit. Producer Dong Yun-chang argues that around 2005 the practice of packaging models as boy- and girl bands had become too expensive. *Idols* winners (such as Chris Lee) brought a guaranteed audience, while still depending on music producers (such as Zhang Yadong) and other company personnel.

By the late 2000s the breakthrough of Taiwanese female singer-songwriters such as Cheer Chen, Deserts Chang and Joanna Wang, as well as the Taiwanese band So Dark Green, embodied a turn towards singer-songwriters 創作歌手. These singers write their own music, participate actively in the recording process and have explicit ideas about their image, freeing their record companies to focus on distribution and promotion. The trade-off is the relative slowness of singer-songwriters in publishing new material. The following paragraphs trace the history of this trend to Tanya Chua, Sandee Chan and Mavis Fan, who since the late 1990s have sought to introduce alternative, gothic and experimental sounds into the mainstream.

## Tanya Chua's Resilience

The Singaporean singer-songwriter Tanya Chua started her career with the English-language albums *Bored* (1997) and *Luck* (1999), later followed by *Jupiter* (2002). In 1999 she recorded her first Mandarin album, *Tanya* 蔡健雅, which contains both covers and Chinese versions of her English songs with lyrics by Taiwanese lyricists. The chorus of the main promotional song SO BORING 好無聊, for instance, changed that of YOU SORRY ASS! (1997) into:

好無聊 真的好無聊	So boring, so very boring.
我想面子沒有愛重要	I'd think love's more important than saving face.
好無聊 你好無聊	So boring, you are so very boring,
假裝一切都很好	pretending everything is ok.

YOU SORRY ASS! is a funny and upbeat break-up song that asserts Chua's resilience. BORING adds a dread of pretense, as it values sincerity over saving face, although she implies that she herself is also pretending by singing "I'm so very boring" in the final chorus. The song thus treats the unresolved conflict between Chinese notions of honor and face, and Western rock-related notions of authenticity. In ALL I NEEDED (2002), resilience lies in the contrast between the pathetic lyrics of unrequited love and the playful guitar picking, cheerful offbeat rhythm and vocal melody that unchangingly starts each phrase on a high note. *Faye Wong* 王菲 (2001) includes an adaptation of ALL I NEEDED as WAIT 等等, and an

adaptation of IT'S YOUR CHANCE (2001) AS WRONG NUMBER, both with new lyrics by Lam Chik that present Wong as teasing and self-assured rather than abandoned.

In the first few years of her career Chua wore jeans and usually presented herself as a folk singer. Later she mainly wore unobtrusive gray and black. In the article "Don't Misunderstand My Cool" 別誤解我的酷, she explains: "In the past I resisted packaging. I thought I was a singer-songwriter who relied on her music and thus didn't need to package herself. Now I have matured, and have started to understand how to enjoy being a woman."<sup>58</sup>

This shift in image relates to Chua's fluctuating success. Whereas her debut albums were well received, Universal decided to drop her in 2001. Chua made a comeback with *Stranger* 陌生人 (2003), which was successful also because the marketing of her new company, Warner, stressed her femininity rather than her independence. In this period her sound was dominated by folk-style ballads that asserted modern woman's ability to survive break-ups.

In 2006, however, Chua's contract with Warner ended and she continued with the independent company Asia Muse, doing all the production herself. In 2008, with her aptly titled album *Goodbye & Hello* (2007), she managed to land her second Taiwanese Golden Melody award for best Mandarin female singer. She had first won it in 2006 with *T-Time* (2006).



Illustration 2.8: Tanya Chua on the cover of her 2007 album *Goodbye & Hello*.

## Sandee Chan's Non-Committalness

愛上美麗的女生	噓！別說話	Falling for a beautiful girl.	Shhh! Don't speak.
希望美麗的女生	帶我回家	Hoping that a beautiful girl	will take me home.

Sandee Chan songs such as BEAUTIFUL GIRL 美麗的女生 (1999) explicitly appeal to lesbians. Or so it seems. In "The Perfect Lie: Sandee Chan and Lesbian Representability in Mandarin Pop Music" (2003), Fran Martin quotes a self-identifying lesbian Sandee Chan fan:

[BEAUTIFUL GIRL] seems to be the projection of masculine desire for a woman. Perhaps because I've always heard Sandee's lyrics from a very female, slightly ironic perspective, I haven't interpreted them in a *nü tongzhi* [lesbian] way.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Zhang 2008.

<sup>59</sup> Martin 2003: 274.

Martin argues that Chan is popular among Taiwanese lesbians because of her reticence 含蓄, referring to the “shhh” in the lyrics above and the “don’t ask, don’t tell” attitude among Chinese communities. However, BEAUTIFUL GIRL and Chan’s music in general sound upbeat and celebratory rather than reticent or implicit. Therefore it would seem that Chan’s appeal lies foremost in remaining non-committal, in considering various possibilities while keeping her distance through irony and pluralism. In terms of genre this means that Chan criticizes the conservatism and predictability of the pop industry, while equally defying being restricted by other genre discourses, most notably the rock mythology.

Chan has an ambiguous relation with pop stardom. After composing the song PERFUME 香水 for Nicholas Tse in 2001, she challenged Faye Wong’s ex-boyfriend in the ironic song NICHOLAS 尼可拉斯 (2004) to change his public ‘bad boy’ persona. Additionally, Chan has worked with pop stars such as Sammy Cheng and Jolin Tsai, while remaining independent herself – for instance, with the band Gold-Worshipping Girls.<sup>60</sup>

就躺在澡盆里面唱歌	Singing as I’m lying in the bathtub,
就躺在澡盆里面唱歌	singing as I’m lying in the bathtub,
虽然唱得很烂	although I sing very badly,
但是要唱得很大声	I have to sing very loud,
啦啦啦. . .	lalala...
要唱成一个人歌王	I’ll sing myself into a king of songs about life!

The “lalala...” of Gold-Worshipping Girls’ KING OF SONGS ABOUT LIFE 人生歌王 (2004) sounds surprisingly joyful and relaxed compared to the ironic lyrics. To be sure, Sandee Chan acknowledges rock’s depth of authenticity, but rather opts for diversity and flexibility:

I think it is easy to make genre works 類型化的東西, for instance if you make hip-hop, dance music or ballads 芭樂歌 all the time, or if you make rock music all the time, even if you perform 做 Sandee Chan all the time... none of that is very difficult. But if you can perform different things aimed at different people, now that, to me, is difficult. ... pop music demands the formation of genre and labels 標籤化 ... As soon as you change genre you exceed its expectation, and your music becomes difficult to classify. And when it defies classification, it becomes very difficult to gain recognition. I know this, but I can’t control myself. ... Genre and label formation and individualization, all of that restricts mature development. ... So, I will pursue more interesting, more different things all the time. This way I accumulate many things, not only music but also things about life and also from a deeper layer, ideologies.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Consisting of Cola King and Veronica Lee. Lee is one of the founding members of the Hong Kong indie label People Mountain People Sea 人山人海.

<sup>61</sup> Chan 2008.



*Illustration 2.9: Sandee Chan on a promotional picture accompanying her 2008 album What If It Matters.*

Sandee Chan produced this video interview five days before the release of the album *What If It Matters* 如果有一件事是重要的 (2008) on her indie company Dollar. In the interview she continues to explain how she developed from minimalism with folk influences in 1994 to alternative rock, to more straightforward rock, to incorporating electronic elements (since 2000) and later also elements of classical music. Firstly, the interview shows the importance of genre to Chan. Secondly, it shows how she develops an esthetics of layering and sampling.

The chorus of *NICHOLAS* is backed by chain-saw sounds, and *BEAUTIFUL GIRL* also contains surprising samples. 1' 21 into the upbeat rock song there is a click as if a cassette deck is being started, and after this a low male voice says, out of

nowhere: “Rock.” In later albums, the layer of idiosyncratic samples becomes increasingly unrelated to the poppy vocal melodies and rock arrangements. The opening song of *What If It Matters*, *TRISTESSE* 離別曲 (2008), starts with a legato accompaniment based on Frédéric Chopin’s *ÉTUDE OP. 10 NO. 3*, interspersed with electronically generated extended glissandi – shooting stars (for *TRISTESSE* Chan worked with Annie, a classically educated Taiwanese DJ living in the USA). The sentences of the verse create a feeling of ostinato that contrasts well with the accompaniment. The song’s lyrics explicitly comment on genre confusion:

最美的時光 聽搖滾樂  
你的臉輕輕貼着我心臟  
不慌不忙  
青春的低頻將延續播放  
越叛逆越顯感傷  
你送了花 粉紅的花  
我的笑聲無邪的不像話  
再壞的傷  
不過就是七月里的陽光燦爛啊  
夏天偷偷刺了一道吻痕在肩膀

那么多愛 那么多幸福  
那樣的感覺變成一段 流行的歌  
最美的時光 跳舞音樂

The best of times, listening to rock,  
your face lightly clings to my heart.  
We are unhurried.  
Youth’s shockwaves still come forth,  
youth rebellion revealing pain.  
You give me flowers, pink flowers.  
My laughter sounds cherubic and out of place.  
The wound deepens.  
Yet the July sun is so splendid.  
Summer has secretly pierced a trail of kisses on my  
shoulder,  
so much love so much happiness.  
All that emotion becomes popular song,  
the best of times, dance music,

震動愛人不安分的心臟  
 清秀長發  
 年輕越搖擺越無限延長  
 不思議 如此閃亮  
 我卸了妝 粉紅的妝  
 曾經是害羞情侶的模樣  
 再壞的傷  
 不過就是你和我最好的照片  
 時間偏偏故意弄臟你我的臉龐

那么多愛 那么多幸福  
 那樣的感覺變成一般輕浮哼唱  
 蕭邦最恨 流行的歌

jolts the restless lover's heart.  
 Comely long hair,  
 youth swaggers into infinity,  
 unfathomable this beaming.  
 I remove my make-up, pink make-up,  
 the image of one-time shy lovers.  
 The wound deepens.  
 Yet it is the best picture of you and me.  
 Time gradually and purposefully dirties both our  
 faces.  
 So much love, so much happiness,  
 all that emotion becomes a trivial croon.  
 Chopin hated popular songs most of all.

Chan recorded *TRISTESSE* in duet with Hebe Tian, a member of the Taiwanese girlband S.H.E. This stresses its theme of the passage of time, because S.H.E. was extremely popular with high school students around 2005. *What If It Matters* won Chan the Golden Song Award for best female singer in 2009, a year after Tanya Chua.

### The Expression of Mavis Fan Herself

The story of Mavis Fan is one of decreasing marketability. In 1995 Mavis Fan gained instant fame as a child star with her 'little witch' 小魔女 series and the singing of cartoon tunes, often adapted from Japan. Songs such as *HEALTH SONG* 健康歌 (1996) addressed a gap in the market. However, when Fan grew up she wanted to make different music, which resulted in the end of her contract with Linfair Records and later caused her to suffer depression. In the late 1990s, Fan had a few karaoke hits as a pop singer but soon switched to jazz and electronic music.<sup>62</sup> In 2001, she explained:

What I want to do most of all is to make music and produce albums according to genres 音樂類型. That's because I like change and am very versatile. I can simultaneously like



Illustration 2.10: Mavis Fan on the cover of her 1997 album *Breathe Out and Get Ready* 稍息立正站好, containing *HEALTH SONG*.

<sup>62</sup> Fan's successful ballads include *SNOWMAN* 雪人 (1996), *DARLING* (1998) and *DISAPPEAR* 消失 (1998). In 2001 she recorded the jazz album *Actress at the End of the World* 絕世名伶 (Cinepoly). Despite favorable reviews, she moved on to experimental electronic music on *Prologue* 序 (Maya Music, with Happiness Wealth Longevity 福祿壽) in 2003 and then recorded the pop album *Is There Any Other Way* 還有別的辦法嗎 (2004, Willin), containing mostly sweet love songs, interlaced with jazz.

electronic music and rock music. While making jazz, I want to be a punk too. If possible I want to make a whole jazz album, then a whole electro album... Unfortunately the Taiwanese market won't accept it.<sup>63</sup>

After working with professional specialists from different genres and publishing her previous three studio albums with different and increasingly indie record companies, Fan started her own label, Vegetarian Fish, in 2006, and the rock band 100% in 2007. Sales figures seem to have become less important to her than self-expression, and presumably they have dwindled.



Illustration 2.11: Mavis Fan and her band 100% on the cover of their 2009 album *Innocent*.

*Breakthrough* 突破 (2007) revolves around Fan's coming into her own. The push for individualism is clearest on *THAT KIND OF GIRL* 那種女孩, where each sentence in the verse starts with "I" and the chorus ends on a repeated "be yourself" 做自己. *WHO CARES WHAT MUSIC IT IS* 管它甚麼音樂, from the ensuing *Innocent* 赤子 (2009), addresses genre explicitly. Every phrase of its shouted verses is answered by heavily distorted guitar in a blues structure as the drums pump a disco beat. The chorus:

管他什麼音樂	Who cares what music it is?
聽了就有蠢蠢欲動的感覺	Hearing it makes you want to wriggle!
管他什麼音樂	Who cares what music it is?
每天都是情人節聖誕節	Every day is Valentine's, Christmas,
歡呼的慶典	a cheerful celebration!

Faye Wong's introduction of coolness was one of the sources that inspired and enabled the careers of Tanya Chua, Sandee Chan and Mavis Fan. These singer-songwriters are aware of their volatile marketability and frequently comment on their genre position in music, lyrics and interviews. Although they have affinities with folk rock and they play in bands, neither Chua, Chan nor Fan defines herself as belonging to any genre. Additionally, connections between these singers have not yet been made explicit, and even the use of labels such as '(female) singer-songwriter' have remained limited. In general, these singers present genre as combinable and transformable at will, rather than as keys to communities to commit to and define yourself by. More recently, a younger generation of Taiwanese female singer-songwriters and bands such as Cheer Chen, Deserts Chang, Joanna Wang and Tizzy Bac have exhibited a similar attitude towards genre, albeit it with a more youthful, fragile and marketable sound and femininity. Rather than showing that

<sup>63</sup> Jia 2001:17.

mainstream music can only be co-optive, these examples suggest that Mandarin pop singers generate opportunities for genre articulation, but may not seek to develop them.

## §4 (New) Folk

Like rock and pop, folk seems to be a straightforward and established genre. In “Use and Ownership: Folk Music in the People’s Republic of China,” Helen Rees writes:

Specifically excluded here from definitions as “folk music” are products of the commercial, mediated popular music industry, along with recently developed genres—such as the modern Chinese orchestra—that borrow heavily from European art music and self-consciously seek to create a modern, urban, internationally oriented aesthetic.<sup>64</sup>

In this section I am interested in the folk music Rees excludes, and in investigating that class-based definition of folk music as ‘music from the peasantry’ which is commonplace in the West and which underlies Rees’ exclusion. A contrasting definition of folk or *minjian yinyue* 民間音樂, ‘music [from] among the People,’ posits it as the music of the Chinese nation. This approach would favor linguistic, geographical and ethnic boundaries over class divisions. It would also present popular music as modern folk.<sup>65</sup>

Sociologist Zeng Suijin develops this argument in *Chinese Mass Music: Mass Music Culture’s Connection to and Dissemination in Social History* 中國大眾音樂: 大眾音樂文化的社會歷史連接與傳播 (2003). Zeng’s elaborate typology centers upon mass music, which according to him is simultaneously the majority of Chinese music in any given period, the source of all creativity, and the true bearer of Chineseness (see Illustration 2.12).<sup>66</sup> Additionally, Zeng attributes innovation to the masses rather than to literati or composers.<sup>67</sup>

Folk’s ‘from among the People’ easily becomes ‘of the People.’ The definition of *min’ge* 民歌 – ‘folksong, People’s song’ – is contested precisely because it embodies a powerful claim to represent *renmin* 人民, ‘the People,’ as in the People’s Republic of China.<sup>68</sup> How do potential genres such as official folk, Campus Song and urban folk articulate their connection to the People? How does this affect their genre identity?

## Official Folk

Since 1984, the biannual CCTV Young Singers Television Contest has been a major stage for official vocal music in the PRC. Since 1986 the show has distinguished categories according to three main singing styles: bel canto 美歌, folk 民族 and officially-

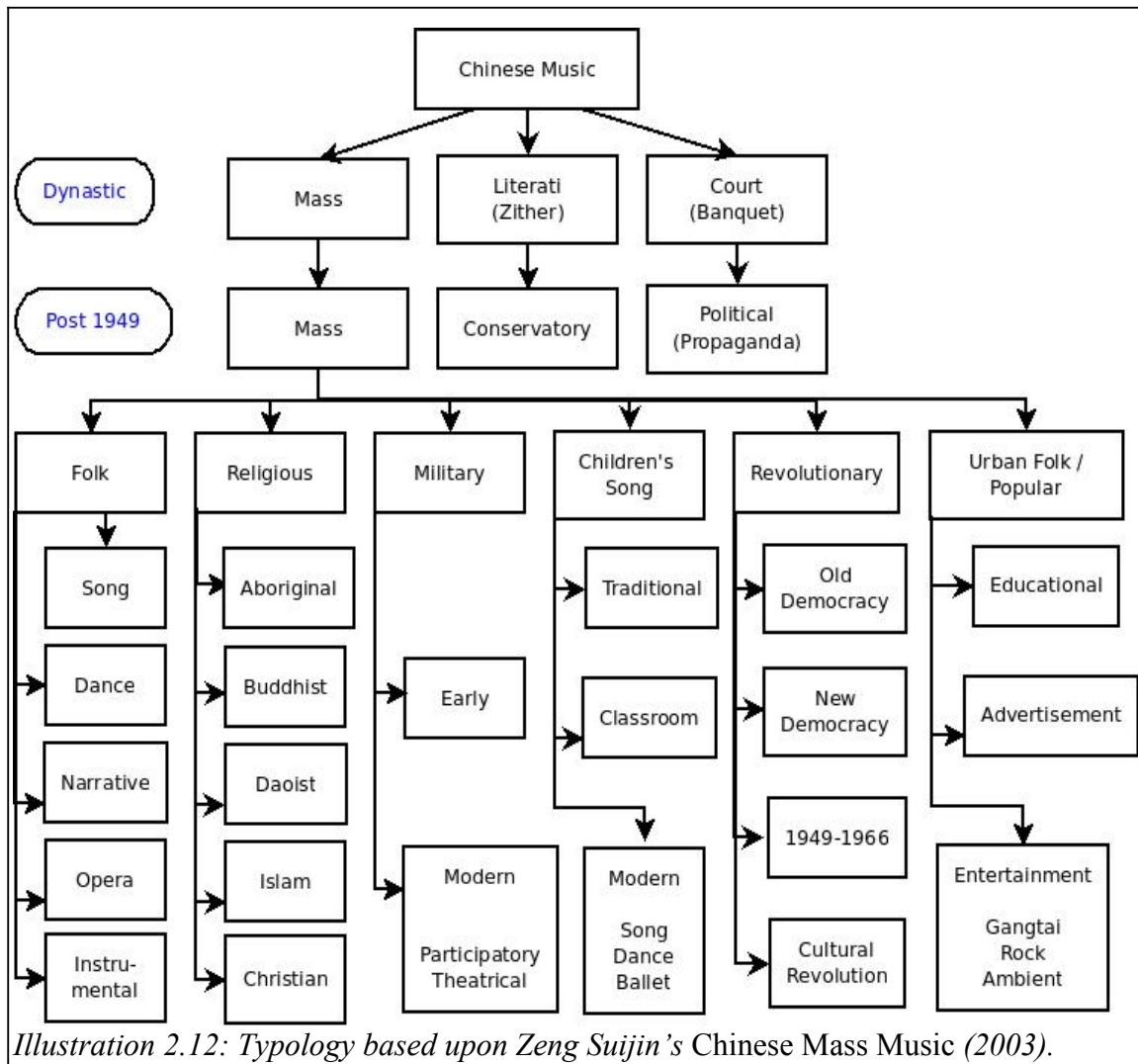
<sup>64</sup> Rees 2009:42-43.

<sup>65</sup> Jin 2002:12-13.

<sup>66</sup> Zeng 2003:17-20.

<sup>67</sup> Zeng 2003:41

<sup>68</sup> See Hockx 1999, Chow 1998:113-132, Baranovitch 2003:67.



sanctioned popular. In contrast to TV shows derived from the *Idols* format, such as *Super Girl* (2004), the Young Singers Contest makes categorical distinctions between professional and non-professional singers. Before looking at important changes that were made to the format in 2006, I will provide a short history of the folk singing style.

### The Main Melody

In the 1950s, newly established folk programs at PRC conservatories provided momentum for the professionalization of a national folk singing style. The 1958 'battle of the native and the foreign' 土洋之爭 marked a watershed that established folk singing as an alternative for bel canto in official events and state-run media. In such events, educated folk singers such as the Tibetan Tseten Dolma embody the nation, propagating what is called 'the main melody' 主旋律. Baranovitch writes:

Official pop songs ... are usually sung either in Chinese artistic folk singing style (*minzu/min'ge changfa*) or in Western bel canto style (*meisheng changfa*). These

two orthodox styles of singing require formal training and immediately invoke the official [C]ommunist aesthetics of professionalism, as well as the seriousness and the sense of formality and authority that are inseparable from much of official culture on the mainland ... During the performance of official songs, the singers ... are denied individuality and transformed into the voice of a force bigger than themselves or the viewer/listener, a force that represents thousands of years of history and millions upon millions upon millions of people.<sup>69</sup>

Jin Tielin, professor at and since 1996 president of the China Conservatory, taught five out of the first seven best folk singers of the Young Singers Contest, including Peng Liyuan. Peng won a non-professional award in 1984, was the first to win the professional award in the folk singing style two years later, and is the wife of Xi Jinping, the current vice-president of the PRC (2010). Jin also taught Li Guyi, who later switched to a more breathy pop voice and became the most important PRC pop star of the 1980s, and Song Zuying, who despite the fact that she came only third in the Young Singers Contest 1990, in that year made her first of 19 appearances on the CCTV Chinese New Year Gala up to 2010.<sup>70</sup> The opening song of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ethnic Minority Movement Conference 中國少數民族運動會, LOVE OUR CHINA 愛我中華 (1991), sung by Song Zuying, is representative of official folk's stress on the unity of the nation in lyrics, music and imagery:<sup>71</sup>

五十六個民族,五十六枝花  
五十六族兄弟姐妹是一家  
五十六種語言匯成一句話  
愛我中華,愛我中華,愛我中華

Fifty-six nationalities, fifty-six flowers,  
fifty-six nations' brothers and sisters are one family,  
fifty-six languages blend into one sentence:  
Love our China! Love our China! Love our China!

In her 1995 hit *SPICE GIRL* 辣妹子, Song articulates her Hmong ethnicity more explicitly, partly by reiterating the Han Chinese stereotype of ethnic minorities as sexually less inhibited. However, the singing style, the orchestration and the borrowings of not one but various Chinese folk traditions in the composed song secure a sense of the unified nation. In subsequent years Song Zuying was rumored to have had an affair with Jiang Zemin, the president of the PRC between 1993 and 2003. Song was nominated for a Grammy Award (2006), held concerts at prestigious venues in Sydney (2002), Vienna (2003) and Washington (2006), and



*Illustration 2.13: Song Zuying and Jay Chou at the CCTV Chinese New Year Gala 2009.*

<sup>69</sup> Baranovitch 2003: 205-206.

<sup>70</sup> On Li Guyi, Cf. Baranovitch 2003: 15-16.

<sup>71</sup> The song was originally written for Wei Wei, who had developed from official folk into pop music and apparently deemed it too ethnic.

performed with the internationally renowned tenor Plácido Domingo at the closing ceremony of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. She also performed with the Taiwanese pop star Jay Chou at the CCTV Chinese New Year Gala in 2009.

Referring to the successes of Song Zuying and other pupils, a 2005 lecture by Jin Tielin stressed the importance of the folk singing style in presenting China both internally and to the outside world. To Jin, official folk is the inevitable and scientific pinnacle of all Chinese folk musics, regardless of their huge differences:

Vocal forms all over the country are strong in local flavor. However, they develop into national vocal music. That is why national vocal music in effect also represents the nation's fifty-six minorities. It is the native sound of the Chinese 中華 peoples.

...

Vocal training goes in three stages: the natural stage, the unnatural stage and the scientific natural stage. I aim at the scientific natural stage. The natural stage is prior to proper study; it's singing what one feels like. The unnatural stage is when through training the natural balance of the original vocal demeanor is broken; it's searching for methods, a new balance. In the scientific natural stage this method is found, and can be employed smoothly to the point where there no longer is any method.<sup>72</sup>

### Original Ecology Folksong

In recent years, scholars in the PRC have questioned this approach. For instance, the music critic Zhang Ping writes that:

Vocal training becomes a standardized production line. Singers become standardized products that the 'education industry' churns out indiscriminately. 'The art of singing' almost becomes 'the technique of singing.'<sup>73</sup>

The influential scholar Tian Qing portrays official folk as (1) devised by academics on the basis of Western esthetics and techniques; (2) claiming a scientific basis while (a) scientific standardization is both opposed to art and (b) the actual teaching, evaluation and esthetics are subjective rather than objective; (3) a movement that was successful in catering to the needs of urbanites in the 1950s to 1990s, but that is out of touch with the increased plurality of China in the 2000s, both in terms of musical style and lyrical content.<sup>74</sup>

The Young Singers Contest provides a focal point for this discussion. On the advice of Tian Qing, in 2006 the contest abolished the distinction between professional and

<sup>72</sup> Jin 2005.

<sup>73</sup> Zhang 2008a:142, Cf. 104-113 and Guo 2007:180.

<sup>74</sup> Tian 2004:10.

un-professional singers, replacing the category ‘officially-sanctioned popular’ 通俗 with simply ‘popular’ 流行 and, most importantly, adding the category *yuanshengtai* 原生态, ‘original ecology, unspoiled,’ for folksongs outside the official folk style.<sup>75</sup> These changes were informed by serious challenges in market share by TV programs in the *Idols* format, but also by the renewed prestige of Chinese folk traditions following the international success of Tan Dun’s compositions and UNESCO’s proclamation of four PRC folk music traditions as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.<sup>76</sup>

Original Ecology challenges the authority of the official folk style, and especially its claim to represent all of China’s vocal music. Critics responded to this challenge by arguing that Original Ecology should be a subcategory of (official) folk, that its performances cannot be compared and judged because they are too diverse and lack a scientific basis, and finally that staging Original Ecology performances compromises its naturalness and innocence.<sup>77</sup> Tian Qing defended the Young Singers Contest by arguing that judging art in all four categories is impossible yet entertaining, and that the television show helps to boost the prestige of local traditions that are rapidly dying out because of modernization by national (folk) and international (pop) musics.

Whereas in the other categories individual performers in suits, evening dresses and military uniforms sing to prerecorded music, Original Ecology singers perform in groups, dress in ethnic costumes and play instruments. It is a category for China’s ‘fifty-six ethnic minorities’ to showcase China’s musical, sartorial and linguistic wealth, as only the Original Ecology performances are in Chinese dialects and languages other than Mandarin (with Mandarin subtitles). At the same time the show is educational, because it frames performances in the context of an exam and evaluation by specialists. Yet the format’s attempt to establish a shared Chinese folk music is undermined by the inability of the contestants to speak Mandarin and to answer the exam questions correctly. In the 2008 Young Singers Contest, audience complaints led to a discussion of the embarrassingly low level of the multiple-choice questions. An expert in a military outfit explained that even though the singers were very knowledgeable in their own traditions but less so in others, the questions “are useful because we are a multi-ethnic nation-state.”

Whereas the bel canto voice of Western-style Art Music and the personal, breathy voice of popular music are discernible categories and perhaps even genres, Original Ecology is too diverse to be a genre. By contrast, what I have called ‘official folk’ does denote a recognizable and coherent music tradition. However, it claims to represent the People as a whole, and refuses to perceive itself as one genre among many. This dilemma also relates to the unresolved tension in official folk between elitist Western-style Art Music and the vulgarity of Songs for the Masses.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>75</sup> *Sheng* 生 is an important term in Chapter 5. The translation is by Helen Rees (Rees 2009:48, 61).

<sup>76</sup> Kun Qu Opera in 2001, The Guqin and its Music in 2003, The Uyghur Muqam of Xinjiang and Urtiin Duu – Traditional Folk Long Song in 2005.

<sup>77</sup> Li 2006; 2008.

<sup>78</sup> On the latter see Wong 1979.

## Campus Song

In the seminal *Who's Over There Singing Their Own Songs* 誰在那邊唱自己的歌, Chang Jian-wei argues that the Taiwanese modern folksong movement consists of three partly overlapping moments. Everything started with highbrow Chinese modern folksong 中國現代民歌, which inspired the radical leftist Summer Wave 夏潮 group, which in turn enabled commercial Campus Song:

Although they equally want to find alternative “songs of our own” outside of Western popularized music, Mandarin popular music and art songs, the difference in constituencies makes them develop structures that are relatively different, including in musical forms, discursive strategies, dissemination networks and social capital.<sup>79</sup>

Inspired by the Beat generation and Bob Dylan, influential essayist and poet Yu Guangzhong and composer Yang Xian introduced the concept of the ‘folk singer’ to Taiwan around 1975. Unlike the pop singer, the folk singer sings self-composed poetry to self-composed music. Debates in this period center on modern folk’s relation to anonymous, ancient and communal traditional songs.<sup>80</sup>

In 1977 the Summer Wave group experimented with informal outdoor concerts on the campus grounds of Tamkang University. Gradually, the original radicalism of anti-Western imperialism and Marxism gave way to a more moderate ideology of self-expression and an esthetics that valued being unglamorous.

By the late 1970s record companies had organized nation-wide singing contests



Illustration 2.14: Cover of the Campus Song compilation album Golden Rhyme Award Ten 金韻獎 (1982, Rock Records).

for students, resulting in profitable samplers, and around 1979 they signed Campus singers such as Jonathan Lee, Tsai Chin, Su Lai and Chyi Yu. Hou Te-Chien’s DESCENDANTS OF THE DRAGON (see Chapter 1) became a huge hit. The position of the political and cultural elite was that folksong should remain pure and untainted by commerce, and its lyrics should not be too dreamy and escapist. The head of the Government Information Office, James Soong, composed new lyrics for DESCENDANTS OF THE DRAGON that better suited the state of war Taiwan was still offi-

<sup>79</sup> Chang 2003:130.

<sup>80</sup> Chang 2003:67, 78-79, 87. Cf. Chang 2003:104-108. On the first experiments with outdoor concerts, see Chang 2003:127-129.

cially in. Whereas the elitist modern folk movement valued social responsibility and political fiat, and the Summer Wave group distrusted commerce, Campus singers felt that these demands restricted their art as well as their livelihood.

Chang explains how commercial success forced a split between genre purists and opportunists.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the marketing of the samplers as “the cry from the heart of this generation of young people” 這一代年輕人的心聲 ignored genre identity, and the careers of the Campus singers illustrate the co-optation of the folksong movement by star-driven pop music. Ex-Campus singer Jonathan Lee helped transform *Rock Records* 滾石唱片 from a magazine on Anglo-American popular music into one of the most influential record companies in the Chinese-language world, and became a star-making producer and songwriter in the process.<sup>82</sup> Although biographies have consistently portrayed Tsai Chin as an uncomplicated folk singer, she soon came to rival Teresa Teng in popularity and has published over 53 studio, live and best-of albums.<sup>83</sup>

Rather than focusing on these commercially successful artists, Chang Jian-wei laments the inability of modern folk and Campus Song to become articulate:

Modern folk was gradually curbed from a musical genre 音樂類型 into one of the many musical forms or marketing elements that record companies may employ. Moreover, it has been relegated to being a mere footnote to the individual character or specialness of singers.<sup>84</sup>

Thus Chang Jian-wei joins Ma Shifan and other Taiwanese intellectuals in eulogizing the early folksong movement as an authentic alternative to mainstream pop, much along the lines of the rock mythology.<sup>85</sup> By contrast, the anonymous author of *Distant Homesickness* 遙遠的鄉愁 shows how Campus Song writers, producers and managers became acquainted with or discovered pop stars such as Teresa Teng, Su Rui and Delphine Tsai and introduced to 1980s mainstream pop music, among other things, a renewed interest in nostalgia.

## Urban Folk

According to Jin Zhaojun, “Every nation 民族 has its own folk music, but the popular music we hear today has a clear origin: America.”<sup>86</sup> Other music critics also stress the connection between acoustic guitar music and the Western-influenced modernity of

<sup>81</sup> Chang 2003:198-201.

<sup>82</sup> On Lee’s importance as a songwriter, see Moskowitz 2010:73.

<sup>83</sup> Revisiting Route 61 2007.

<sup>84</sup> Chang 2003:213. Cf Chang 2003:187.

<sup>85</sup> Ma 2006. Chang’s narrative ends in 1982, after which he only discusses the politically interesting cases of Lo Dayou in the 1980s and the protest folk band Work Exchange in the 2000s. Cf. Revisiting Route 61 2007:203 (on fading folk and pop and Delphine Tsai), 183 (on a songwriter of Teresa Teng).

<sup>86</sup> Jin 2002:12-13.

China's east-coast metropolises. For instance, Yan Jun's "The Lamp of the Folktune" 民謠之燈 (2008) ends with:

Only in the city can there be true folktunes, because the city takes away our heart, producing distance and rendering the memories of home indistinct. Without distance, there can be no folktunes. ... The lamp always burns to transcend time and space.<sup>87</sup>

By contrast, when asked about recent Chinese folktune artists such as Zhou Yunpeng, Wang Xiaofeng replied:

Because there are no modern folktunes in China, questions concerning China's folktunes are false. Mostly, mainland Chinese folktunes are discussed on a level of commerce and not on that of music. All concepts used to define them are merely imported goods. These concepts lack content. I base myself on the idea that folktunes are rooted in reality 現實 and tradition, while I haven't seen these two aspects in China's so-called folktunes.<sup>88</sup>

Wang has a point when he argues that the terms 'urban folk' and 'Campus Song' were imported to the PRC from Taiwan and other places by record companies in order to package artists.<sup>89</sup> Rather than discrediting these efforts and musicians, below I will survey four strategies for claiming folk authenticity: idyllic perfection, bohemianism, documenting, and root-seeking. The four strategies highlight, respectively, (the projections of) the urban middle-class; (the autonomy of) the artist/artwork; contemporary social reality; and tradition. Although as concepts of folk authenticity they may conflict, in practice success lies in negotiating and mitigating any conflicts, rather than in choosing one strategy at the expense of the other three. Next to showing that folktunes are hardly a coherent genre, this is an attempt to map folktunes' diverse strategies in giving voice to the People.

### Idyllic Perfection

If you really write songs for the ordinary people but they don't like them, now that's a surprise.<sup>90</sup>

Two years before making this remark in an interview, Wang Xiaofeng wrote a short celebratory piece about the folk singer Hong Qi. The article praised Hong's debut album *Red*

<sup>87</sup> Yan 2008a. I translate *min'ge* 民歌 as *folksong* and *minyao* 民謠 as *folktune*. Yan Jun defines 'folksong' as traditional and 'folktune' as modern, but both terms have traditional roots and are used interchangeably today. Because official pop is labeled 'folksong,' in the PRC 'folktune' has a more colloquial and less official feel.

<sup>88</sup> Anonymous 2007. Cf. Wang's polemic with Zhang Xiaozhou over Wang Lei's album *Belleville* 美麗城.

<sup>89</sup> Li 2006a.

<sup>90</sup> Anonymous 2007.

*Snow Lotus* 紅雪蓮 (2005) as addressing what “is most lacking in the pop music of this era,” namely true emotions of the People, and it expressed appreciation of the transformation of Hong Qi’s image from a poet appealing to intellectuals in 1994 to that of a lower-class itinerant singer ten years later.<sup>91</sup> Hong Qi elaborated on this latter point when he was asked whether he was just exploiting folklore, or actually giving the lower classes a voice:

There’s no question about representing or not, because I myself belong to the grassroots class. ... Because I express a personal experience and because I have been in the living and cultural conditions of the lower class for a long time, therefore, when I express and narrate my own personal experience, I in fact simultaneously express and narrate the experience of many others.<sup>92</sup>

Hong’s remarks stand out because of their pretentiousness in claiming to speak for many, rather than portraying a single, particular experience. Also Hong background as a Uyghur raised by Han Chinese parents informs his efforts to bring various peoples together, for instance through his yearly memorial concerts for Wang Luobin, a Han Chinese folksong collector of dubious standards. Wang Luobin felt that the Uyghur folk songs he collected, edited and made famous since the 1930s were his property, and accused Lo Ta-yu of copyright infringement when he reused *YOUTH DANCE* 青春舞曲 (1983).<sup>93</sup>

Secondly, to Hong Qi, folk music is the music of lower classes in both the city and the countryside. He elaborates this when defining his New Folksong movement:

The New Folksong movement is defined by (1) being of the people 民間性, original and modern; (2) continuing, destroying, rebuilding and innovating; (3) being at ease, spontaneous, oneself and free. ... Another main point is that the New Folksong movement seeks poetic delivery and respects the beauty of language itself. Creatively, it emphasizes the relation between words and sounds and the beauty of rhyme. Spiritually, it advocates the openness of souls, pursues a healthy and optimistic lifestyle and rejects the negative and dispirited.<sup>94</sup>

To Hong Qi and many other singers, ‘urban’ and ‘folk’ are not mutually exclusive, and neither are ‘new’ and ‘folk.’<sup>95</sup> The main challenge to folk singers such as Hong Qi is not the politics of city-dwellers claiming to represent the countryside, but the problem of articulating a mainstream Chinese alternative to ‘Westernized pop.’ Hong Qi:

<sup>91</sup> Wang 2005.

<sup>92</sup> Guo 2007a: 182.

<sup>93</sup> Harris 2005. Cf. Chapter 5.

<sup>94</sup> Chen 2008.

<sup>95</sup> Baranovitch 2003:162-172.

I feel extremely shocked by descriptions of myself and other folktune singers as small-groupish 小眾. I want my songtunes 歌謠 to be heard by more people, to be popular on a large scale. But like so many other folktune singers who currently have a following, I lack works with a mass appeal.<sup>96</sup>

Successful singers such as Ai Jing and Dolan seamlessly blend folk, mass and pop music. Urban folk singer Ai Jing's signature song MY 1997 voices the aspiration of the Chinese People as a whole to travel to Hong Kong after the handover. Dolan's huge hit *The First Snowfall of 2002* 二零零二年第一場雪 (2002), combines nostalgia for the community feeling and mass music of the Mao Zedong era with the exoticism of Xinjiang folk traditions – the pseudonym 'Dolan' being a generic name for itinerant singers in China's outer Western regions.

Hong Qi, Ai Jing, Dolan and other folk singers with pop aspirations typically favor idyllic perfectionism. They present the untainted 'true, good and beautiful' 真善美 as eternally unattainable: it is nostalgically situated in the past, exotically in another culture, and/or erotically in an unavailable lover.<sup>97</sup> To varying degrees, this perfectionism is audible in the production of the studio albums of Chet Lam in Hong Kong and those of Pu Su, Wang Juan, Zhou Yunpeng, Wan Xiaoli and Zhu Fangqiong in Beijing, all of which stress slick perfection rather than the rough authenticity that is generally associated with folk.

## Bohemianism

According to Jeroen de Kloet, "what sets [PRC folk-rock singers] apart is not only their refusal to be glamorised, but also and mostly the importance attached to writing one's own songs and lyrics."<sup>98</sup> In "Avant-Garde, Cutesiness and New Folksong Together in the Trenches: The Year 2007 in Chinese Folktunes" 同一戰壕里的先鋒，小可愛與新民歌：中國民謠的二〇〇七年, the music critic Li Wan similarly stresses originality, and moreover compares trends in folktunes to literary genres.<sup>99</sup> The connections between a number of folk artists and poetry and avant-garde go beyond shared limited marketability to include explicit cross-references, the glorification of perseverance at the margins of society, and a knack for experiment.

In the 1970s, 'rusticated youths' 知識青年, urban youths who had heeded Mao Zedong's call to learn from the peasants, put poetry to music. These songs are among the earlier examples in the PRC of a long tradition of folk renditions of poems and the treatment of folk lyrics as poetry. Wan Xiaoli's adaptations of poems by Li Yawei and Gu Cheng, and the references on Zhou Yunpeng's album *Chinese Children* 中國孩子 (2007)

<sup>96</sup> Chen 2008.

<sup>97</sup> Li 2008a:49. Cf. Zhang 2007: 22-29. On nostalgia Cf. De Kloet 2010:79-81.

<sup>98</sup> De Kloet 2010:76

<sup>99</sup> Li 2008a:55-56.

to Allen Ginsberg and Lu Xun, are examples from the 2000s. In the 1990s, Zhang Chu gained success among students with his innocent demeanor, balladry and poetry.

Like that of most folk singers in the PRC, Zhang's music presents less the nation or tradition than an authentic, personal reaction to China's sweeping modernization and urbanization, as evidenced in album titles such as *To Be Lonely Is a Shame* 孤獨的人是可恥的 (1994) and *Factory for Building Airplanes* 造飛機的工廠 (1998). From THE SELF-KNOWLEDGE OF TEMPERATURE 冷暖自知:

走出城市 空空蕩蕩  
大路朝天 沒有翅膀  
眼裡沒誰 一片光亮  
雙腿夾著靈魂 趕路匆忙

Leaving the city empty and deserted,  
an avenue towards heaven without wings.  
No one in sight, vast sunlight,  
soul clamped between my legs, quickly moving ahead.

...

我沒法再像個農民那樣善良  
只是麥子還在對著太陽憤怒生長  
在沒有方向的風中開始跳舞吧  
或者繫緊鞋帶聽遠處歌唱

I can no longer be as kind as a farmer.  
It's just that wheat still grows forcefully towards the sun.  
In this directionless wind, let's start dancing  
or while fastening shoelaces listen to faraway singing.

THE SELF-KNOWLEDGE OF TEMPERATURE refers to the poetry of Yi Sha and Haizi, and in general Zhang Chu's lyrics embed pastoral longing in a decidedly urban, modern and perhaps even elitist perspective.<sup>100</sup> Even when Zhang devotes a song to blessing "workers, farmers, petite bourgeoisie, girls and police officers" (namely BLESS THE PEOPLE THAT HAVE FINISHED EATING 上蒼保佑吃完了飯的人民), or when he describes lower-class urbanites such as MISS ZHAO 趙小姐 and OLD ZHANG 老張, or describes the lower classes in general as ants (in ANTS ANTS 螞蟻螞蟻), he does so from a slightly patronizing distance that presents hardship and struggles as endearing and containing a purity and honesty that are no longer accessible to Zhang and his audience.<sup>101</sup>

Zhang Chu owes his success partly to the Taiwanese record label Magic Rock (a subsidiary of Rock Records), which produced and published his debut album. However, most PRC folk musicians of the 1990s and 2000s had limited prospects of upward mobility compared to Taiwanese folk singers from the late 1970s onwards. This has prompted PRC folk musicians to value perseverance at the margins of society. In a rare appearance on state television, host Lu Yu whipped up compassion by focusing on hardship, asking Xiao He and Zhou Yunpeng: "How much would you earn singing in the street?"<sup>102</sup> Longing for the life of an itinerant musician is also the reason why Zhang Quan of the influential folk band Wild Children pulled the plug on the River Bar in August 2003, saying, "I

<sup>100</sup> On "wheat," Cf. Crevel 2008: 105-107; on "without wings," Cf. Crevel 2008: 206-208.

<sup>101</sup> Du 2004. Wang 2007:231.

<sup>102</sup> Lu 2009.

never got used to a stage. It isn't the best way of singing.”<sup>103</sup> Additionally, in the lyrics of folk music, migration and mobility are recurrent themes.<sup>104</sup>

The River Bar opened in March 2001 and was the first venue that focused on urban folk music. Previously, folk musicians had performed in Beijing Underground venues, such as Nameless Highground, alongside other newly introduced musics of limited marketability. Since 2003, they do so once again, now in D-22 and Dos Kolegas. But between 2001 and 2003, the small venue in one of Beijing's busiest bar streets became a hotbed for a folk scene that favored acoustic instruments in intimate settings, developing improvisation and audience interaction. Xiao He's first solo album *Birds that Can Fly High Don't Land on the Backs of Oxen that Can't Run Fast* was recorded in the River Bar. In *THAT'S NOT MY NAME* 那不是我的名字, he shout-sings:

我愛她 因為她是我的	I love her because she's mine.
后來我遲到了	Later I was too late.
以后每天我就拿着	Every day since I stood on the street
一個啤酒瓶站在街口	with a bottle of beer in my hands...
一群孩子圍着我	A group of children surrounding me,
向我喊着一個人的名字	shouting someone's name at me,
瘋子	'Madman!'
那不是我的名字	That's not my name.

Xiao He's debut album adheres to folk stereotypes concerning unadornedness and willed naiveté, capitalized upon by the packaging of the record company Modern Sky – the sound has hardly any post-production, and the container is of recycled paper in earth colors with hand-written lyrics. Poet Yin Lichuan's liner notes read: “Facing the worldly bar crowd, Xiao He's performance is as unhurried, involved and happy as in his youth when he was reclining against the hillside, herding sheep, facing the vast landscape.” Both with his band Glorious Pharmacy and in other solo work, Xiao He's performances are much more eclectic, borrowing from jazz, World Music and experimental electronic music. Xiao He himself has described his music as ‘free folktunes’ 自由民謠.

Zuoxiao Zuzhou has been involved in musical experimentation since the mid-1990s, including the use of treated violins on *Temple Fair Tour* 廟會之旅 (2000) and extended overdubs on *Big Things* 大事 (2009). He has used artworks by Yang Shaobin and Ai Weiwei, and his music appears in the video art of Yang Fudong, Li Zhanyang and others. At the same time, Zuoxiao Zuzhou emphasizes that his songs make extensive use of folk instruments and subject matter.

I don't write songs for stinking intellectuals, yet they like me. I write for farmers, but when they hear it they think I'm [mentally] ill. Too noisy and the lyrics are

<sup>103</sup> Zong 2008.

<sup>104</sup> De Kloet 2010:81-82.

unintelligible. I am both frustrated and amused by this. I hope one day they will understand that I write songs for them.<sup>105</sup>

A similar tension between avant-garde and folk is apparent in the oeuvre of Dou Wei; the development of Wang Lei from his folksy debut album *Journey Man* 出門人 in 1994 to the technology-savvy World Music album *Belleville* 美麗城 (2003); and the sample-driven work of Liang Yiyuan since 2009. It is possible to maintain a Western-centric folk ideology and argue that these artists operate in a borderland between folk, avant-garde and World Music. However, it is more productive to accept that the reservations about modernity and its electronic instruments that are often associated with folk in the West do not resonate in China. From the outset, (urban) folk in China has been an attempt to redefine or even reinvent the past and the local within a thoroughly modern and globalized present. This renders it unproblematic that the elaborate use of electronics and digital sound effects is the norm rather than the exception in the various Chinese folk scenes. In short, techno-reluctance is often overruled by the pursuit of idyllic perfection, artistic freedom and experimentation, especially in the music of Xiao He, Zuoxiao Zuzhou and Liang Yiyuan.

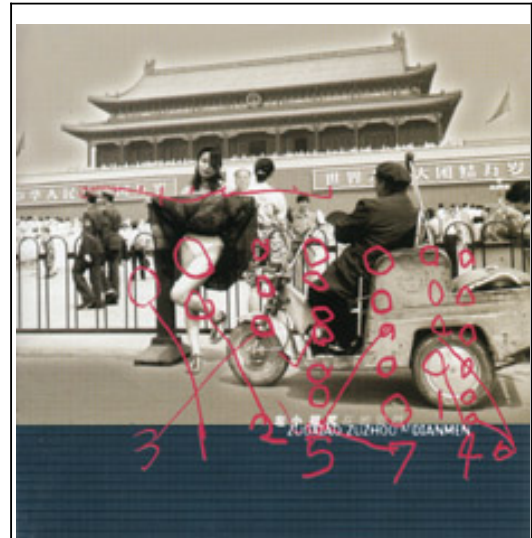


Illustration 2.15: Cover of Zuoxiao Zuzhou's 2001 album *At Di'anmen* 在地安門 (Taiwan version), using Ai Weiwei's artwork *Tian'anmen* 天安門 (1994).

## Documenting

The main difference between Xiao He and his precursor Hu Mage lies in Xiao He's stress on live performance and improvisation. Just like Xiao He, Hu Mage debuted with a predominantly acoustic folk album with a long title and suitably packaged by Modern Sky.<sup>106</sup> The process of home recording sparked Hu's interest in electronic equipment, and the subsequent albums *Killing Seven in One Stroke* 一把掌打死七個 (2001) and *Umpleg* 不插腿 (2005) consist of unsettling sound collages that perform the bricolage of rapidly changing urban China. In a 2002 interview Hu Mage said: "I often say I document life, which only refers to the small portion of the life I experience, or that I observe."<sup>107</sup>

Already in *SOME POTATOES ENTER THE CITY* 部份土豆進城 on his debut album, Hu ridicules the romantic views that intellectuals have of the countryside:

又放一些不太好聽 很吵的歌給我聽

Then [the cultured person] plays unpleasant, noisy songs for me.

<sup>105</sup> Guo 2007a:192. Cf. Yan 2004: 232, 253-254.

<sup>106</sup> *Everybody Has a Little Stool, I Won't Take Mine into the Twentyfirst Century* 人人都有個小板凳, 我的不帶入二十一世 (1999).

<sup>107</sup> Jin 2003:207.

他說那是在讚美我們，他說他就是我們  
 可卻要把笑容墊在屁股下面的椅子上  
 又提到“虛偽”什麼的，  
 還說了一些城市的壞話  
 好多詞我都聽不太懂 只好歉歉的說：  
 這個，我說不好！這個，我實在說不好

He says they praise us, he says he is us,  
 but hides his smile on the chair under his ass.  
 Then he mentions “hypocrisy” or something  
 and says bad things about the city,  
 most of the words I don’t understand.  
 I can only timidly say:  
 [in dialect] This I couldn’t tell.  
 This I really couldn’t tell.<sup>108</sup>

Hu’s use of samples extends this parody to another trait associated with folk music: representing the daily life of contemporary lower classes. By using samples, artists such as Hu Mage and Liang Yiyuan grotesquely amplify the lyrical documentation of, for instance, Zhang Chu’s *OLD ZHANG* (1998) and Xiao He’s *OLD LIU* 老劉 (recorded with Glorious Pharmacy in 2008), whose lyrics respectively depict city life and echo a tragic news item.

The commonplace of documenting local life through music has been kept alive in recent years by artists such as the street musician Yang Yi, the Nanjing singer Li Zhi and the Taiwanese Hakka singer Lin Sheng-xiang. The last of these is salient not only because he captures Meinung village life by recording dialect songs in a local barn, but also because Lin Sheng-xiang and his former band Work Exchange participated in a so-far successful protest against the building of a dam in their hometown. This shows that documenting and preservation may also be the beginning of an emancipation. This emancipation begins with presenting the local and lower class not as undeveloped and backward, but as valuable and worth preserving. A next step would re-articulate the local and lowly as being entitled to power and rights. This would prepare a social critique of cultural capital(s), national politics and global modernization (in the case of Lin Sheng-xiang, the WTO). However, in the PRC, folk’s contributions to the emancipation of the local and lowly are relatively muted.

## Root-Seeking

Next to reflecting current reality, musicians have used folksong to regain contact with the past, which in China is a strong claim to legitimacy. Cui Jian’s 1991 reclaiming of the folksong *NANNIWAN* 南泥灣, made into a Communist propaganda song in 1941, is a high-profile example. Its impact is clear from the fact that it was censored. More low-key, Wild Children devoted their entire oeuvre to collecting and adapting North-Western Chinese folk tunes. Former band members Zhang Weiwei and Guo Long continue this project, while also performing with Xiao He. The authentic continuation of tradition is also an explicit purpose of the Xinjiang guitar player Zhu Fangqiong, the Beijing-based Xinjiang-Kazakh musician Mamu’er and the Beijing-based Mongolian band Hanggai. This also renders these bands suitable for World Music concerts in the West. Not only

<sup>108</sup> Cf. De Kloet 2001:76.

Lin Sheng-xiang, but also Wild Children, Mamu'er (with IZ) and Hanggai have performed internationally (Hanggai after being coached and recorded by the Briton Robin Heller in 2007).

The PRC Beijing-centered folk scene revolves around small bars such as the River Bar, Jiangjinjiu, Jianghu; folk stages on music festivals; labels such as 13<sup>th</sup> Month, Daomadan and Maybe Folk; and samplers such as *Flower Village* 花園村 (2004) and *Red Bulldozer* 紅色推土機 (2009). Despite the potential for genre formation, folk does not distinguish itself from other scenes and remains vibrantly in-between perfectionism, experimentation, documentation and root-seeking.

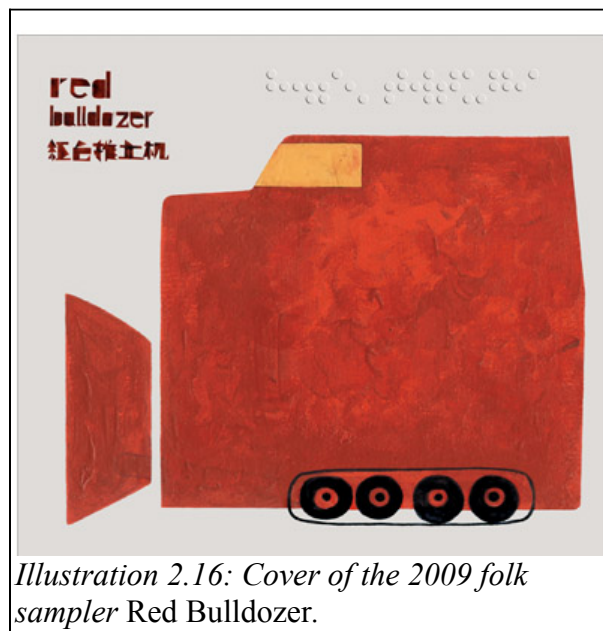


Illustration 2.16: Cover of the 2009 folk sampler Red Bulldozer.

## §5 Concluding Remarks

Publications on Chinese popular music are almost never organized around genres. The scenes that Jeroen de Kloet discusses in *China with a Cut* provide the most comprehensive survey of potential genres in Chinese popular music to date. However, the heuristic value of this categorization is debatable. Xiao He has more in common with “Underground artist” Zuoxiao Zuzhou than with fellow “folk-rocker” Zhang Chu. “Underground band” Second Hand Rose’s travesty of the rock mythology resembles that of the “pop-punk” band New Pants. These discussions extend beyond the Beijing band scene as soon as we ask whether Taipei-based 1980s Campus and 2000s singer-songwriters belong to folk, pop or any other scene.

Pierre Bourdieu argues that “the *boundary* of the field is a stake of struggles, and the social scientist’s task is not to draw a dividing-line between the agents involved in it by imposing a so-called operational definition.”<sup>109</sup> Here, my description of “the frontier[s] delimiting the territory held by the competing agents” reaches an ambivalent conclusion. On the one hand, language-geography-ethnicity, generation, gender and marketability go a long way towards explaining and mapping the uneven terrain of Chinese popular music. Rather than as representatives of genres, it may be more productive to regard Xiao He, Second Hand Rose and Faye Wong as representing, respectively, low marketability (frequently performing live to a few dozen people), medium marketability (regularly to audiences up to a thousand people) and high marketability (sporadically to tens of thousands of people). On the other hand, dispensing with the notion of genre altogether does not seem to be productive either. The potential of kinds of music to articulate collective senti-

<sup>109</sup> Bourdieu 1983:324.

ments and identities is also important in China; this happens, for instance, when the rock mythology binds the Underground together. The notion of genre is useful to identify in Peking Opera, sinified rock, 1930s Shanghai pop, *gangtai*, official folk and Campus Song the potential to function as standards around which kindred souls congregate – standards that can be reproduced across locations, moments, genders and degrees of marketability.

Bruno Latour foregrounds the way in which metrological standards such as the platinum kilogram function to discuss quasi-standards, such as best practice and stereotypes.

It is no use saying that those categories are arbitrary, conventional, fuzzy, or, on the contrary, too sharply bounded or too unrealistic. They do solve practically the problem of extending some standard everywhere locally through the circulation of some traceable document—even though the metaphor of a document might dim somewhat. ... the circulation of quasi-standards allow [sic] anonymous and isolated agencies to slowly become, layer after layer *comparable* and *commensurable*—which is surely a large part of what we mean by being human.<sup>110</sup>

Bruno Latour also argues that these standards are not given, but constantly negotiated, maintained and checked.

My argument on the usefulness of genre in understanding Chinese popular music ultimately ends in a discussion between universal standards and the particularity of specific locations. Genre enables comparison of Chinese popular music to music in other parts of the world. But at the same time, genre works differently in China than it does in many other places. This is partly because other ways of collecting collectives, namely around the four organizational principles, are more common, and musicians, gatekeepers and audiences have put less work into developing and maintaining genre standards. In the end, rather than tabooing the notion of genre, I hope this chapter has contributed to unraveling the larger issue of articulating collective identity through kinds of music.

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<sup>110</sup> Latour 2006:230.

# Chapter 3: Sex, Gender, and Desire

## §1 Fantasy

就像你註定是要離開的

Like you were destined to leave.

[No guitar, silence. Xiao He seems to say to himself:]

對不起

Sorry.

[To the audience:]

世界卻不會  
因為你走了而停止

The world, however, won't  
stop turning because you're gone.

In the verses of *SIMPLE TRUTH* 簡單的道理 that precede the above, Xiao He sings of impossible love. Xiao He's desire for his Lady is inflamed by her inaccessibility. In these last lines, Xiao He traverses the fantasy: he reveals his Lady to be insubstantial and redundant. Nevertheless, the ensuing instrumental, tango-like chorus creates a mixed feeling of sadness and relief. It does not suggest the awakening to propriety, to commonsensical reality that might be expected. On the contrary, *SIMPLE TRUTH* ridicules common sense from the start. It starts with a joke:

[Background noises of people talking, drinking, laughing, a few seemingly randomly placed staccato chords on an acoustic guitar, pause. Xiao He starts sing-talk-ing a capella:]

鼻涕会流到嘴里  
口水却流不到鼻子里

Snot can drip into the mouth.  
Spit however can not drip into the nose.



Illustration 3.1: Xiao He and Li Tieqiao performing *SIMPLE TRUTH* with *Glorious Pharmacy* at the *Midi Modern Music Festival 2004*.

这是一个简单的道理  
简单得不用阐述  
也知道是错的道理

That's a simple truth,  
so simple that even without explaining  
you know it's a false truth.

Although SIMPLE TRUTH is atypical because it ridicules commonsensical reality, it may reveal something about love songs, which dominate Chinese popular music. In this chapter I will analyze love songs in a psychoanalytical framework, and connect them to issues of sex, gender and desire.

### The Troubadour and the Lady

SIMPLE TRUTH exhibits the basic narrative that underlies all the relations of desire I will discuss. Xiao He's positioning vis-à-vis an absent, inaccessible Lady can be compared to courtly love as eulogized in the canso of European troubadours. Jacques Lacan explains this love in his psychoanalytical framework:

It is impossible to serenade one's Lady in her poetic role in the absence of the given that she is surrounded and isolated by a barrier... The object is not simply inaccessible, but is also separated from him who longs to reach it by all kinds of evil powers.<sup>1</sup>

The Lady in courtly love is an example of what Lacan calls the *objet petit a*. The *objet petit a* is the object/cause of desire: that onto which a split subject \$ projects his/her desire ◇ or that which triggers a subject's desire in the elementary narrative of fantasy (\$ ◇ a). The Lacanian philosopher Slavoj Žižek writes:

Fantasy does not simply realize a desire in a hallucinatory way ... fantasy mediates between the formal symbolic structure and the positivity of the objects we encounter in reality – that is to say, it provides a 'schema' according to which certain positive objects in reality can function as objects of desire, filling in the empty places opened up by formal symbolic structure.<sup>2</sup>

Desire is intricately linked to what it means to be a subject. According to Lacan, subjectification happens in two stages. In the imaginary or mirror stage, the infant encounters a coherent but also estranged image of him- or herself. This abstraction develops fully in the symbolic stage when the child learns to manipulate symbols (signifiers). In other words, the loss of unity that started with the cutting of the umbilical cord gains a whole new level of intensity with the learning of language, from the father, hence the Law-of-the-Father. The *jouissance* or enjoyment of being-in-the-real gets lost in the endless deferral of symbols. Lacan calls this loss 'castration':

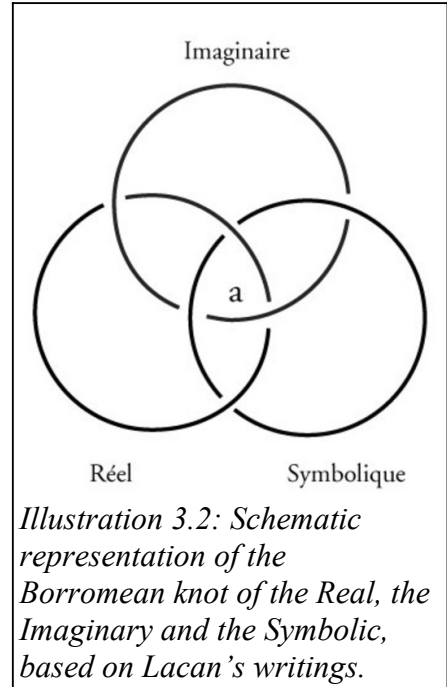
<sup>1</sup> Lacan 1992:149-151 (translated by Dennis Porter).

<sup>2</sup> Žižek 1997:7. Cf. p. 10, and Žižek 1989:46.

It is castration that governs desire ... Castration means that *jouissance* must be refused, so that it can be reached on the inverted ladder of the Law of desire.<sup>3</sup>

The tripartite structure of the (inaccessible and disruptive) real, the imaginary (of the mirror stage) and the symbolic (of language) form a Borromean knot, in which taking away one ring would leave the others unconnected, and by extension the subject in ruins (see Illustration 3.2). In other words, this knot constitutes the human condition. Lacan:

There is, according to [psycho-]analytic discourse, an animal [i.e. the human in the real order] that happens to be endowed with the ability to speak [i.e. the symbolic order] and who, because he inhabits the signifier, is thus a subject of it. Henceforth, everything is played out for him at the level of fantasy, but at the level of a fantasy that can be perfectly disarticulated in a way that accounts for the following – that he knows a lot more about things than he thinks [i.e. the imaginary order] when he acts.<sup>4</sup>



## An Eternally Sweet Void of Desire

SIMPLE TRUTH discredits the symbolic order in the first verse through humor. In the second verse, Xiao He addresses *jouissance* through the necessary (minimal) distance of fantasy:

臉被打腫之前  
眼淚砸到了腳上  
濺到了腳旁邊的地上  
滲到了腳旁邊的泥土裡  
在地的另一面

Before the face is beaten up,  
teardrops shatter on the feet  
spattering over the earth beside the feet  
oozing into the mud beside the feet  
on the other side of the earth...

[Xiao He draws out the words of the last sentence, stressing every syllable. The melody ascending, the acoustic guitar and the accordion join in a light crescendo, only to end in a full stop, creating silence for the next sentence, whose melody ends on a low note.]

生長成了海

It grows into a sea.

<sup>3</sup> Lacan 2001:323, 324 (translated by Alan Sheridan). Cf. Žižek 2006:34: “castration is the gap between what I immediately am and the symbolic title that confers on me certain status and authority.”

<sup>4</sup> Lacan 1998:88, quoted in Belsey 2005:39. Cf. Žižek 2006:8-9.

[Instrumental chorus. When the bridge is almost finished for the second time, Xiao He suddenly plays loud staccato chords, disrupting the flowing feeling of the chorus and throwing us back into the verse.]

臉被打腫之後	After the face is beaten up,
從側面看	seen from the side
鼻子就看不見的	the nose cannot be seen. [Audience laughs.]
鼻血像精子一樣射出	Blood shoots out of the nose like semen
於是敵人摔倒在豆漿裡	so the enemy tumbles into the soy milk.
豆漿裡放了太多糖	There is too much sugar in the soy milk
於是敵人終於沒有逃出	so in the end the enemy cannot get out.
敵人是註定要死的	The enemy was destined to die.
豆漿卻永遠都是甜的	The soy milk however is eternally sweet.

The violence in these lyrics stems not so much from the failure to curb *jouissance* into language as from its success in doing so, since humor and absurdity suspend the symbolic order, giving free play to *jouissance*. Xiao He truly wishes his frigid Lady dead, but can only express this in fantasy. The absurd transposition of the description renders the death wish acceptable, and makes the audience complicit by making them laugh.

In the last lines of the song, Xiao He kills his Lady, albeit symbolically. These lines are followed by the last instrumental chorus, thus valuing the *jouissance* of musicality (real) over the interplay of lack and desire of language (symbolic), in a way reminiscent of Romanticism. Žižek:

In contrast to deceiving verbal speech, in music, it is, to paraphrase Lacan, the truth itself which speaks. ... What music renders [with Romanticism] is no longer the “semantics of the soul [of the Enlightenment],” but the underlying “noumenal” flux of *jouissance* beyond the linguistic meaningfulness.<sup>5</sup>

This celebration of Romantic *jouissance* can also be found in other songs of Xiao He, his reluctance to use language (see Chapter 1) and his connections to avant-garde art (see Chapter 2). For instance, Glorious Pharmacy’s first studio album *Please Enlarge My Cousin’s Picture* 請給我放大一張錶妹的照片 (2005) opens with 24 DEGREES 24度, “the most suitable temperature for the human body:”

迎面開來一輛大車	A big car comes at me, head-on.
我沒有躲得過	I can’t dodge.
我躺在馬路的中央	Lying in the middle of the road,
像是躺在媽媽的懷里	it’s just like in in my mother’s arms.

<sup>5</sup> Žižek 2004:18.

媽媽的懷里從來都沒有高于24度	In my mother's arms it's never more than 24 degrees.
現在正哭泣在妻子的懷里	Now I'm crying in my wife's arms.
妻子的懷里從來都沒有高于24度	In my wife's arms it's never more than 24 degrees.
其實最不需要的就是警察	In fact what we need least of all is the police.

The equation of mother and wife, and the antipathy for the police as representative of the Law-of-the-Father invite a psychoanalytical reading, with the car accident as the violent rupture in the symbolic order that catapults the protagonist back into the womb's *jouissance*. Žižek writes:

Desire and *jouissance* are inherently antagonistic, even exclusive: desire's *raison d'être* ... is not to realize its goal, to find full satisfaction, but to reproduce itself as desire. So how is it possible to couple desire and *jouissance*, to guarantee a minimum of *jouissance* within the space of desire? It is the famous Lacanian *objet petit a* that mediates between the incompatible domains of desire and *jouissance*. In what precise sense is *objet petit a* the object-cause of desire? The *objet petit a* is not what we desire, what we are after, but, rather, that which sets our desire in motion, in the sense of the formal frame which confers consistency on our desire: desire is, of course, metonymical; it shifts from one object to another; through all these displacements, however, desire none the less retains a minimum of formal consistency, a set of phantasmic features which, when they are encountered in a positive object, make us desire this object.<sup>6</sup>

In 24 DEGREES and SIMPLE TRUTH, Xiao He celebrates pre-symbolic unity. However, he does so by creating a fantasy through the manipulation of the desire-permeated symbolic order. This fantasy involves the strategic discrediting of fantasy. It discredits fantasy by strategic positioning of the Lady as an unattainable *objet petit a* and the instrumental chorus as a semblance of pre-symbolic *jouissance*. The common sense of SIMPLE TRUTH's last verse signifies not closure and disposal, but going through fantasy. SIMPLE TRUTH performs a sane distance to fantasy, even though this means accepting castration and lack – as the song's abrupt ending on the third beat of the measure may suggest. Žižek:

Traversing, going through the fantasy, means that we accept the vicious circle of revolving around the void of the object and find *jouissance* in it.<sup>7</sup>

## Chinese Genders

Love songs never tire of retracing these circles, with specific instances exploring and favoring particular articulations, settings and divisions of roles. Below I will gradually unpack and extend the basic narrative that fuels desire, starting from the castrated subject

<sup>6</sup> Žižek 1997:39.

<sup>7</sup> Žižek 1998:210. Cf. Žižek 1997:30-33.

\$'s circling around the void of the object of desire. In doing so, I will investigate culturally specific articulations, settings and, especially, gender roles.

The title of this chapter, *Sex, Gender, and Desire*, originates from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*.<sup>8</sup> Sex is the real of love.<sup>9</sup> It includes the physicality and activity of human bodies, but that is perhaps already saying too much, since the real cannot be presented symbolically. The significance and attraction of material objects and biological traits are the results of the curves, gaps and inconsistencies of symbolic space.<sup>10</sup> Focusing on gender, I submit that it in itself forms a Borromean knot of real, symbolic (gender expectations, laws, appellations) and imaginary (coherence, unconsciousness) orders that is permeated by *jouissance* and desire.

Song Geng argues that in China the masculine/feminine opposition needs to be supplemented with that between *yin* 阴 and *yang* 阳:

*yin* or *yang* is not a biological entity but a fluid position in the hierarchy of social and political power. A minister was in the *yang* aspect in relation to his wife but was in the *yin* position when he faced the emperor in court. Therefore it would not be difficult to understand the tradition of speaking from the voice of a female persona when addressing the emperor or superiors in Chinese literature.<sup>11</sup>

This interpretation of *yin* and *yang* is consistent with gender's dissociation from biological traits, and offers a powerful tool for the interpretation of Chinese gender roles. For instance, in SIMPLE TRUTH *yang*-associated humor and violence force the opponent's threatening *yin* back into its obedient position. However, this paradoxically happens through drowning in sweetened milk, which suggests *yin*'s water-like powers. Furthermore, musically, the wordless chorus suggests the underlying dominance of *yin*, albeit in a subdued way. The organization of this chapter is dictated by the interplay of *yin* and *yang* as well as by the basic narrative of desire. I explore gender roles related to the beauty (§2), the talent (§3), toughness (§4), rivals and brothers (§5), the moon (§6) and the fox fatale (§7).

## §2 The Beauty

Where the canso of the twelfth-century troubadour can be seen as the locus classicus of love poetry in the European tradition, I see the 'talent and beauty' 才子佳人 story *The Western Wing* 西廂記, written by Wang Shifu (ca. 1250-1300), as embodying the stereo-

<sup>8</sup> Butler 1990: 6-7.

<sup>9</sup> Žižek 2006:49: "since sexuality is the domain in which we get closest to the intimacy of another human being, totally exposing ourselves to him or her, sexual enjoyment is real for Lacan: something traumatic in its breathtaking intensity, yet impossible in the sense that we cannot make sense of it. This is why a sexual relation, in order to function, has to be screened through some fantasy."

<sup>10</sup> Žižek 2006:72-73: "in a way that echoes Einstein, for Lacan the Real – the Thing – is not so much the inert presence that curves symbolic space (introducing gaps and inconsistencies in it), but, rather, an effect of these gaps and inconsistencies."

<sup>11</sup> Song 2004:15. Cf. Brownell 2002:26.

typical romantic relations of Chinese tradition. Wilt Idema and Stephen West note that *The Western Wing* was known as a lovers' bible, offering a rich vocabulary, gender types, models for action and clues to the negotiation of stereotyped fantasy (romance) and social reality (marriage).<sup>12</sup>

*The Western Wing* tells of student Zhang who at first sight falls in love with the beauty Oriole Cui. They consume their romantic sentiment 情, which contrasts with the stereotypical *canoso*; with *The Western Wing*'s precursor, the Tang Dynasty 'marvelous tale' 傳奇 *Tale of Oriole* 鶯鶯傳 (aka *An Encounter with an Immortal* 会真記, by Yuan Zhen (779-831)); and with later Chinese romanticism such as *A Dream of Red Mansions* (by Cao Xueqin (1715-1764)). In *The Western Wing*, the couple have a tryst, and finally they marry.<sup>13</sup>

The dynamics between *yin* and *yang* drive the plot of *The Western Wing*. On his



Illustration 3.3: Publicity magazine cover for the 1927 film *Romance of the Western Chamber* 西廂記 (d. Hou Yao). The film tells how student Zhang saves Oriole Cui, prompting viewers to save the nation. In an innovative dream sequence Student Zhang beats his rival with a giant brush/phallus (Harris 1999:68).

way to the capital to secure a place in the *yang* world of public service, student Zhang enters the world of *yin*: the action takes place in the seclusion of a monastery where Zhang is at the mercy of women. With her common sense and detective work, it is Oriole Cui's worldly-wise maidservant Crimson who reminds the couple – and especially Oriole Cui – of social reality when they seem to get carried away in the 'talent and beauty' plot, was which by then already commonplace:

Now I believe that poets and beauties really exist,  
But in Crimson's eyes they are a bit perverse—  
It seems to me that passionate people who do  
not get their heart's desire are like this:  
What I see is that they suffer so much, they become bewitched;  
And what I find is that they never give a second thought  
But immediately bury their heads to prepare for a wasting death.<sup>14</sup>

Oriole Cui is torn between filial piety – obedience to her mother – and romantic desire for student Zhang, delineated by a sexuality that "seems to be a mystery

<sup>12</sup> West 1995:96.

<sup>13</sup> Song 2004:102.

<sup>14</sup> West 1995:78.

to her, something almost unconscious.”<sup>15</sup> The only viable reconciliation is marriage, in other words, Oriole Cui’s transformation from inaccessible Lady “insubstantial as a mirage” into wife and mother, from object/cause of desire into subject.<sup>16</sup>

The traditional femininity of which Oriole Cui is a paradigmatic example is continually reiterated in popular media, including pop songs, theatrical performances, TV adaptations and films based on traditional and newly written ‘talent and beauty’ stories. In the following pages I will focus on the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially on contributions by songstress Zhou Xuan (1918-1959) and female impersonator Mei Lanfang (1894-1961) to the concept of the ‘new woman’ 新女性 that emerged in China between 1911 and 1949.<sup>17</sup>

### The Female Impersonator

In Peking Opera, as in many other Chinese operatic traditions, roles are divided into role-types, and actors specialize in these types. For instance, the *dan* 旦 is the role-type for female roles such as Oriole Cui and Concubine Yu in *Farewell My Concubine* 霸王別姬. Mei Lanfang was trained as a *dan*. In other words, he was a female impersonator, and a very successful one. Mei introduced a new, elaborate and visually attractive subdivision of the *dan*, the *huashan* 花衫, capitalized upon the star system that emerged through newly established mass media outlets, and transformed Peking Opera into a national art form.

Throughout the dynastic period, music and theater were considered vulgar, and the divisions between performers, courtesans and prostitutes were fluid. Opera actors could be approached for sexual favors.<sup>18</sup> Joshua Goldstein writes:

Mei succeeded despite the fact that a disparaging association of *dan* actors with homosexuality was pervasive throughout the Republican period [1912-1937]. This may be because, at the same time, the expansion of the female audience problematized the prevalent forms of homoerotic spectatorship. Thus, with the inclusion of women, the admiring erotic gaze of the audience became more polyvalent. In Mei’s case, the media found it both provocative and profitable to direct this ambivalently gendered gaze upon China’s most beautiful man/woman.

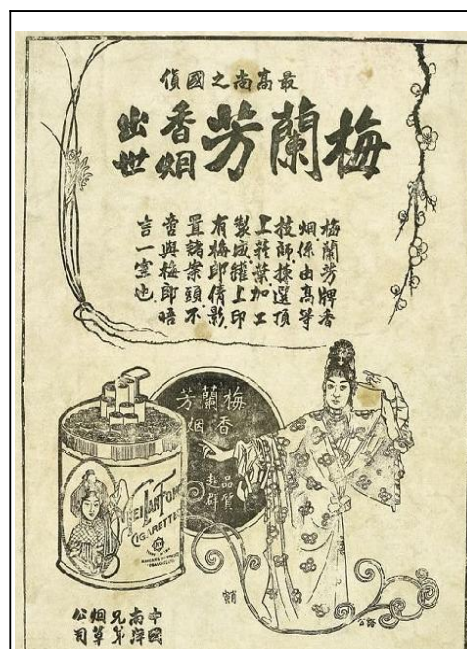


Illustration 3.4: Advertisement of Mei Lanfang cigarette in Good Friend Pictorial 良友畫報, 1926, issue 12.

<sup>15</sup> West 1995:69.

<sup>16</sup> West 1995: 62, 60. Lee 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Chou 2004:112.

<sup>18</sup> Zou 2006:87 cites an explicit 1912 police report. Cf. Sommer 2002.

Journalists alternately described Mei as exquisitely dignified, a handsome playboy, a youthful bride, and a natural-born sex kitten (*tiansheng youwu*). While numerous cosmetic companies, targeting female consumers, solicited Mei's endorsements for their youth-preserving creams, the gaping crowds invoked in many articles were clearly comprised of both sexes.<sup>19</sup>

The increasing prominence of the male *dan* resonates with the emergence of the new woman.<sup>20</sup> The gist of Goldstein's article on Mei Lanfang on the one hand, and Andreas Steen's article on Zhou Xuan and parts of Andrew Jones's *Yellow Music* on the other, is that these stars successfully couple *yin*-beauty to a nationalist *yang*-discourse. Mei Lanfang presented Peking Opera as the artistic embodiment of the national soul, with the help of critics such as Qi Rushan. Zhou Xuan performed the pathos of the songstress as metaphor for national crisis, with the help of Leftist Shanghai cinema. This coupling worked both ways: it rendered the nationalist agenda appealing, and eroticism acceptable.

### The Songstress

Oriole Cui's central scene is her love letter, in which she voices anxiety at the prospect of accusations of immoral behavior, effectively manipulating to her advantage the role of abandoned woman prescribed by the 'talent and beauty' model. The songstress 歌女, a stock figure of Shanghai cinema since the 1920s, similarly appeals to *yang*-powers to come into action by the dramatic display of *yin*-powerlessness – now leaving the rescue to the *yang*-invested audience. Zhou Xuan defined the songstress through her cinematic and musical performances, and her well-known turbulent but unhappy love life and her mental instability serve as the primary evidence for the popular belief that she *is* the "songstress at the end of the world" 天涯歌女. Sam Ho writes:

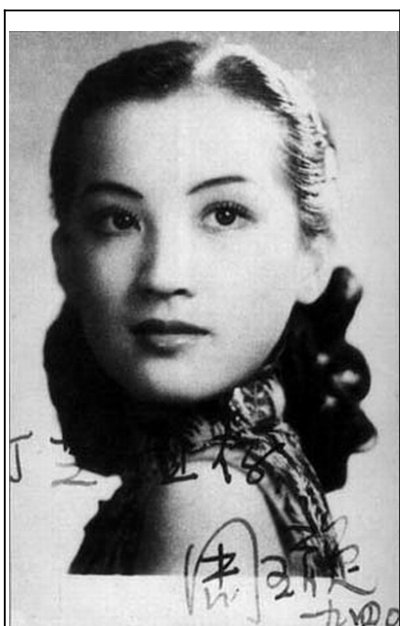


Illustration 3.5: Zhou Xuan.

The brilliant title number in *Song of a Songstress* 歌女之歌 (1948) offers a succinct portrayal of the songstress persona. Appearing at the end of film, the scene takes Zhou [Xuan] back to the nightclub, from where songstresses can never escape. Despite having just witnessed her whole life crumbling down on her, Zhou is back on stage, she performs an upbeat song, wearing a glittery gown and a big, professional smile ... her music isn't able to solve

<sup>19</sup> Goldstein 1999:395-6.

<sup>20</sup> Consequently, although Mei performed Oriole Cui, he is better known for adopting a version of *Farewell My Concubine* 霸王別姬 that centers on Concubine Yu. Cf. Li 2003:79, Zou 2006.

anything. In fact the very performance is a tragedy, a testimony to the powerlessness of the songstress and her song.<sup>21</sup>

Rather than contrasting Mei and Zhou as traditional and modern, I note that both made use of modern technology and responded to modern social developments while reiterating the traditionally prescribed eagerness of women to sacrifice themselves for their men. Likewise, rather than presenting Mei as male and Zhou as female, I observe that both profited from and contributed to the increasing participation of women in public life. At the same time this female emancipation was limited, including for Zhou Xuan. Her stardom was constructed by men, almost as much as Mei Lanfang's, as Li Jinhui's control over the all-female Bright Moon Troupe shows.<sup>22</sup> The division of labor in the Bright Moon Troupe, with women performing center stage, and men supporting and controlling from behind the scenes as composers, managers, lyricists and instrumentalists, has been the norm of Chinese popular music for decades, even though since the 1970s men have also stepped into the limelight as singers.

## Beauty

According to Andrew Jones, the songstress “sells songs ... and by extension her own body.”<sup>23</sup> In response to accusations at the time, Li Jinhui legitimized center-staging beauty 美 by invoking Social Darwinism. He is quoted in Jones' *Yellow Music*:

Just as butterflies represent the glory of insectdom, beautiful people represent the cream of humanity. ... China's most beautiful people represent the glory of the Chinese race ... but our custom is to look down on “pretty boys and girls.” [This] could even lead Chinese culture and the Chinese essence into degeneracy.<sup>24</sup>

Mei Lanfang and Qi Rushan also enshrine beauty. Mei combined three existing *dan*-roles that centered on sexuality (*huadan* 花旦), moral integrity (*qingyi* 青衣) and martial skills (*daomadan* 刀馬旦) into a new role-type, the *huashan*. Combining these aspects enabled Mei to perform parts that were well-rounded and could compete with the hitherto most popular role-type, that of the *laosheng* 老生, for respectable, senior male roles. Mei also innovated curtains, costumes (such as the fish-scale dress for Concubine Yu) and added dances (such as the sword dance in *Farewell My Concubine*). Qi juxtaposed Peking Opera's beautification 美術化 to the realism of Western theatre.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, newspapers organized contests to have readers select the most beautiful male *dan*. These contests adopted century-old traditions of listings, such as the “flower registers” in brothels, to the

<sup>21</sup> Ho 1993:61. Cf. Kar 2004:233, Steen 2000:128n9, Jones 2001:134. *The Lives of Republican Women as Songs* sums a whole list of bullied and often suicidal movie stars in this period (Wang 2004a:167).

<sup>22</sup> For Li Jinhui see Jones 2001:88. For Zhou Xuan see Jones 2001:126. For Mei Lanfang, see Zou 2006:90.

<sup>23</sup> Jones 2001:126.

<sup>24</sup> Jones 2001:89 (his translation).

<sup>25</sup> Goldstein 1999:385.

newly emerged mass media. In doing so, this development foreshadowed the emergence of celebrity culture and anticipated the star system that characterizes Chinese popular music.<sup>26</sup>

### §3 The Talent

Where does the popular equation of entertainment with *yin* and beauty leave displays of masculinity? Marc Moskowitz argues in *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow* (2010):

Mandapop revolves on several axes ... and in each case *yin* seems to be victorious over *yang* ... Women have become the cultural ideal for what the majority of Chinese hope to be.<sup>27</sup>

Moskowitz writes these words about the new millennium, but in earlier decades, too, mandapop only sporadically legitimized itself by appealing to the *yang*-world of politics. Until the 1970s, almost all mandapop singers were female, stressing their *yin*-position with respect to the gaze of the audience. The few male singers, such as Yan Hua and Yao Min, cultivated the sound-image-text of the young student, often in duets with female singers.<sup>28</sup>

Besides the Chinese gender type of dangerous/desirable *yin*-Lady with which Oriole Cui struggles, in student Zhang *The Western Wing* also offers a locus classicus of the male gender type of the young student, or better, the talent.<sup>29</sup> Compared to the scholar or gentleman, the talent is immature and hence more susceptible to the lures of *yin*. Both the talent and the scholar's prowess are based on *wen* 文, 'civil, sophisticated,' as distinct from *wu* 武, 'martial' abilities.

The talent is sometimes perceived as fragile and effeminate, also within China, because of his good looks, youthfulness and particularly because of his *wenrou* 溫柔, 'tenderness, gentleness.'<sup>30</sup> However, Baranovitch, following Kam Louie, argues that sophisticated-*wen* is definitely masculine, and Moskowitz also concludes that "the *wenrou* male should not be seen as lacking masculinity in the context of Mandapop."<sup>31</sup> To explore the slippages and ambiguities between gentle-*wenrou*, femininity and homosexuality, I will consider the performances of the Hong Kong singer Leslie Cheung, also because Moskowitz' informants describe Cheung as the paradigmatic *wenrou* performer.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Zeitlin 2006:86.

<sup>27</sup> Moskowitz 2010:87, Cf. 29. Cf. Baranovitch 2003:110.

<sup>28</sup> Sun 2004a:113, 125, Cf. 150, 188, 189.

<sup>29</sup> Song 2004:27.

<sup>30</sup> Song 2004. Baranovitch 2003:112. A related term is *yinrou* 陰柔 'yin-softness, accommodating,' which is the antonym of *yanggang* 陽剛 'yang-toughness, stern.'

<sup>31</sup> Moskowitz 2010:101. Baranovitch 2003:133.

<sup>32</sup> Moskowitz 2010:92.

## Dandy

In the 1960s, the Beatles and other rock bands proved to Hong Kong youngsters that men could sing pop songs too. Hong Kong male singers soon dropped the initial link with the *yang*-world of politics. Whereas Sam Hui has frequently addressed social issues since the 1970s, often in a soothing, descriptive vein, Alan Tam's repertoire in the 1970s and 1980s already consisted exclusively of soft love songs, and Leslie Cheung's performances between 1983 and 2003 can be seen as developing this movement.<sup>33</sup> Natalia Chan writes:

[Cheung] led us into a new age of total feminization and redefined the beauty of men's femininity.<sup>34</sup>

Cheung had an extensive and versatile career as both singer and actor. I follow Chan's characterization of Cheung's star persona in the 1980s as a dandy.<sup>35</sup>

Like the talent, the dandy is good-looking, middle-class, and prey to fits of infatuation 痴情. However, at the same time the dandy has cosmopolitan connotations, given the term's French and British origins. This not only suits 1980s, British-occupied Hong Kong, but also the biography of Cheung, who was sent to a boarding school in England at the age of thirteen.

Secondly, the dandy's absorption with clothing and physical beauty also resonates with Cheung's star persona. Cheung's father was a tailor whose customers included American actors such as William Holden and Cary Grant. For a short time, Cheung himself studied textile management at the University of Leeds. In *Leslie Cheung: Butterfly of Forbidden Colors* 張國榮：禁色的蝴蝶 (2009), Natalia Chan describes Cheung's transformation from expensive suits in the mid-1980s, through his successful introduction of the still meticulously designed 'casual look' in Hong Kong, to the increasingly extravagant and decadent outfits of the 1990s and 2000s.

PINING MAN 怨男 (1996, clip 2003) shows a lawyer, a policeman, a mechanic and others taking off their uniforms after office hours, changing into brightly colored, outrageous outfits and going to a party where Leslie Cheung sings "without love how can pinning men be human 做人."<sup>36</sup> This brings us to a third aspect of the dandy: decadence, and the dandy's ethical and sexual ambiguity. PINING MAN was published on *Red* 紅 (1996), the album which marked Cheung's return as a singer after a silence of six years during which he focused on his acting career.<sup>37</sup> His film roles, and by extension his public persona, had

<sup>33</sup> For info on Sam Hui, see Wong 1990:65-81, Man 1998. See Wong 1990:85, 86 on the intervening stars. On Alan Tam, see Wong 1990:73-79, 83.

<sup>34</sup> Chan 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Chan 2004, Luo 2009: 57. Wong 1990 calls Cheung a yuppie.

<sup>36</sup> Luo 2009:54

<sup>37</sup> Cooperation with lyricist Lam Chik and producer C.Y. Kong. The tour included a show in Amsterdam between May 12 (London) and 25 (Perth) 1997.

become more openly sexually ambiguous, developing inclinations of the dandy in the direction of the diva.

In the 1980s Cheung had acted morally ambivalent roles, often *huahua gongzi* 花花公子, 'flowery aristocratic youngsters,' a term usually translated as *playboy* that has stronger heterosexual connotations than the dandy. Both 12<sup>th</sup> Young Master of Stanley Kwan's *Rouge* 胭脂扣 (1988) and Yuddy in Wong Kar-wai's *Days of Being Wild* 阿飛正傳 (1990) are unreliable seducers. In the 1990s Cheung explored gender confusion. In *Farewell My Concubine* (1993, d. Chen Kaige), a film that fictionalized parts of Mei Lanfang's biography, Cheung portrayed the unrequited love of a male *dan* for his male stage partner. In *He's a Woman, She's a Man* 金枝玉葉 (1994, d. Peter Chan), Cheung played a songwriter who falls in love with a male singer who in the end turns out to be a female singer in disguise. Natalia Chan argues that Cheung's acting and biography add a layer of meaning and ambiguity to what are otherwise homophobic films and that "these are roles that could not have been performed by anyone else but Leslie Cheung."<sup>38</sup> Additionally, Helen Leung argues in *Undercurrents* that Cheung's contributions to Hong Kong queer culture lie, not in a bold coming-out, but in offering an ambiguous space constructed through cross-references between film roles and his star persona.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout the 1990s, the Hong Kong tabloid press reported aggressively on Cheung's sexuality. This dominated the news to the extent that Huang Shujun sings in *CHANGING 1995 改變1995* (2001), which recapitulates 1990s, "Leslie Cheung finally happily admits he's a gay." Nevertheless, despite many hints of homosexuality, Cheung stopped short of going against Confucian family values.<sup>40</sup> Even his dedication of Teresa Teng's *THE MOON FOR MY HEART* 月亮代表我的心 "to the two most important people in my life" at a concert in 1997, which is generally considered as his coming-out, was indirect. Leung writes:

The first person Cheung mentioned was his mother, whom he affectionately addressed among the audience. "The second person," Cheung continued, still addressing his mother, "is someone who has stood by me for more than ten years, who selflessly supported me when I was down and out, even lent me several months of his salary so I could survive. Of course you know who it is I'm talking about: it's my good friend, your 'bond-son' (*qizai* [契仔]) Mr. Tong" ... Not only had Cheung insistently embedded queer kinship within the familial structure, but he had routed queer relation through his mother while reclaiming injurious and insulting terms (by ironically adopting the tabloid address of "Mr. Tong" and by implicitly acknowledging Tong as his *qidi* [bond-younger brother]).<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Luo 2009:103.

<sup>39</sup> Leung 2008:91-95

<sup>40</sup> Luo 2009:53

<sup>41</sup> Leung 2008: 98-99

Despite cross-references and synergy, Cheung is not his film roles or his stage persona. Natalia Chan's equation of actor and role – reiterating Chinese sayings such as 'person and play are one' 人戲合一 and 'life's like a play' 人生如戲 – signify the desire of the fan, projecting depth into the idol.<sup>42</sup> She willfully falls prey to Lilian Lee's romanticism. Lee wrote the novels on which *Rouge* and *Farewell My Concubine* are based, and both stories invite the viewer to confuse fantasy and on-stage reality, and by extension (mise-en-scène) to confuse them with outside reality.

## A Tango of Idolization and Identification

In the canso, the troubadour eulogizes his inaccessible Lady. For Oedipus, a locus classicus of psychoanalysis, his mother is his Lady, and the evil powers that separate him from her are his father, both in person (King Laius) and sublimated as the prohibiting Law-of-the-Father. Freud calls Oedipus' desire to have his mother *Objektbesetzung*, 'object cathexis, possession by a psychic or libidinal energy directed at an object.' I will call this 'idolization.' By contrast, Oedipus' relationship with his father is defined by the desire to become, in other words, by symbolic identification.

These relations are diametrically opposed: idolization stresses distance and difference, and identification ignores distance and difference. However, Freud also writes that young children start out bisexually, oscillating between desiring and identifying with both parents until they learn the Law-of-the-Father.<sup>43</sup> In the next pages I argue that Leslie Cheung, and by extension pop stardom, simultaneously provide fantasies of idolization (having the star, making love to him or her) and symbolic identification (being the star, leading his or her glamorous life).<sup>44</sup>

The percussion intro of RED sounds through the dark Hong Kong Coliseum.<sup>45</sup> Cheers of recognition. The suspense is enhanced by the motionless, blindfolded models, clad in black leather, lace, feathers, rising in couples on elevating platforms on the now dimly lit stage. They caress each other, hardly discernible through the mist. Leslie Cheung changes clothes in the middle of the group of models. A synthesizer violin theme breaks the rhythm. This bridge ends with a bass chord on the piano. Leslie Cheung in black pants and jacket with shiny black pearl inlays. The lower part of his body. Red pumps. Close-up of the shoes, as if we are kneeling. Cheung with arms crossed in a pose of careless waiting. Rising still, his face: short hair shows his earpiece and microphone, brightest red lips. After letting us wait for two and a half minutes, finally: "Red..." Cheung calmly sings the obscure text to the low, drawn-out melodies of the first verse and chorus, accompanied by shots of his lips and graciously moving hands, diamond ring. "You are the reddest wound, perhaps..."

<sup>42</sup> Luo 2009:102, 134.

<sup>43</sup> Freud 1955:261.

<sup>44</sup> These distinctions relate to Lacan's "having the Phallus" and "being the Phallus." Cf. Middleton 2006:91-135, Butler 1990:138-172.

<sup>45</sup> Description on the basis of Leslie Cheung's live DVD *Across 97 跨越 97*, 1' 17-1' 25.



*Illustration 3.6: Leslie Cheung and Zhu Yonglong dancing the tango during RED as part of the Across 97 tour.*

As dancer Zhu Yonglong turns pirouettes, long black drapes fly around his naked chest. He follows Leslie Cheung, who doesn't look back, across the stage. Only Zhu and Cheung are standing erect. Cheung sings the second verse and chorus: "Red, as flames of arrogance flickering through the years." At the end of the chorus the music recedes (1' 21' 30). Zhu and Cheung dance facing each other, both backed by a group of models. They circle, mirror each other's movements, pose in narcissistic self-embrace, walk up to each other. Cheung pushes Zhu's arm aside, straightens his jacket and walks on to sing the first verse again. Only then does he accept Zhu Yonglong's hand. They meet cheek to cheek for the tango (1' 22' 30). Cheung wraps his body around Zhu several times, sits on his lap. Shots of red pumps and black leather shoes. Cheung rubbing his back up to Zhu's chest, leading Zhu's hands to massage his loins. Turning around and bringing his face up to Zhu's. Suddenly and violently pushing him away (1' 23' 24). Cheung lies down elegantly and lifts up his feet. The models surround him, one male model

changes Cheung's high heels for shiny black boots, caresses his legs, helps him up. Again Cheung pushes him away. Smiling deviously at Zhu, Cheung throws him a piece of jewelry as the music fades (1' 24' 12). When the stage lights go on again, Leslie Cheung has abandoned what appears to have been a role, to cheerfully thank Zhu Yonglong for his choreography.<sup>46</sup>

This performance of RED is part of the Across 97 跨越97 tour, which consisted of 55 concerts between December 12<sup>th</sup> 1996 and June 17<sup>th</sup> 1997. The DVD of the tour also includes Cheung's version of THE MOON FOR MY HEART. In this performance of RED, Cheung performs the Lady. The bright red colors, shiny diamonds, spotlight and microphone place Cheung in the center of attention. At the same time the dance movements, bottom-up camera shots, perfect beauty and diva-like behavior put Cheung out of reach and render him enigmatic. The role of the dancers is ambivalent. On the one hand, they are voiceless and faceless stand-ins for the desiring audience. On the other hand, the caressing and obedience of the dancers stresses that Cheung is in control, that his word is law. This invites identification with his position.

<sup>46</sup> Chan 2005. Luo 2009:96.

RED's ambiguity is representative of Cheung's music between 1995 and his suicide in 2003. Its interplay of gazes, including homo-eroticism, narcissism and inhabiting the position of the Lady can also be found in the clip of DREAMING OF THE INNER RIVER 梦到内河 (2001), in which Cheung photographs the Japanese ballet dancer Nishijima Kazuhiro. The clip was briefly banned in Hong Kong for "promoting homosexuality."<sup>47</sup>

*Across 1997* contains a number of songs that refer to Cheung's film roles, including *Farewell My Concubine*. The performance of RED was most likely inspired by a tango scene in *Happy Together* 春光乍洩 (1997, d. Wong Kar-wai), which was shot in late 1996. In that scene Ho Po-Wing (Leslie Cheung) teaches tango steps to Lai Yiu-fai (Tony Leung) during their stay in Buenos Aires (34' 46). The tango relates to the soon-ending happiest time of the gay couple.

Casual clothes. Clumsy movement through the small room. White bandages on Ho's hands light up. No faces, the only light comes through the window. Ho gestures that Lai should practice the steps and goes to sit in front of the television, which has been murmuring in the background. Cut. "Yeah, I'm ready," gesturing Ho to come over. "Can't be." As they start dancing, we are at the same level as their faces. Close together, step, turn. First sounds of the TANGO APASSIONADO: FINALE by Astor Piazzolla, a repetitive theme on piano supported by a steady bass. Almost immediately (35' 29) a cloudy sky over a "stinking oil-slicked port called La Boca."<sup>48</sup> A high solo on the bandoneón (35' 39). Lai and Ho dancing amongst the garbage in the dirty, neon-lit kitchen, increasingly entwined. No camera movement. Registration of how Ho bends over backwards, how he throws his body at Lai, who leads. Ho turns fewer pirouettes. Only an intimate swaying of the hips. Ho puts one hand under Lai's sleeveless shirt, on his chest. Almost motionless now. First Ho turns his head away, strokes through Lai's hair. Then he answers Lai's kisses. Touching each other frantically. The sound of a ringing telephone doesn't succeed in penetrating the music. Cut to Lai in the night, outside the tango bar he used to work at (36' 47), the music – "meant to be played by half-drunk musicians in a bordello" according to Piazzolla – goes on as if they are still dancing.<sup>49</sup>

*Happy Together* shows more intimacy and messiness than RED, partly due to the medium. In tune



Illustration 3.7: Ho Po-Wing (Leslie Cheung) teaches tango steps to Lai Yiu-fai (Tony Leung) in *Happy Together* (1997).

<sup>47</sup> Luo 2009:90, 117.

<sup>48</sup> Doyle 1996:30.

<sup>49</sup> Paraphrasing producer Kip Hanrahan (Hanrahan 1993).

with Wong Kar-wai's oeuvre, the tango scene presents nostalgia: the more intimately Lai and Ho dance, the more intense the looming feeling of inevitable loss, of the minimal distance that is unsurpassable. Lai provides the voice-over of *Happy Together* and thus presents the main point of identification. His narrative revolves around his desire for Ho and the impossibility of their being happy together. Ho (Leslie Cheung) makes impossible demands (like a superego), but is also vulnerable and in need of nursing.<sup>50</sup>

Both tangos perform the minimal distance of bodies and fantasies. They function on the basis of belief: "Yes I know it's not true, but *what if* he was so close that he could croon into my ear."<sup>51</sup> The *what if* is the minimal distance that enables identification, while securing inaccessibility and thus idolization and possession.

## §4 Toughness

Leslie Cheung shows that *wenrou*-gentleness can be successfully mobilized to perform queer identities. However, this does not mean that *wen* masculinity is inherently gay or effeminate. It is central also to ostentatiously heterosexual singers. Now I will turn to tougher gender roles, developing Oedipus' violent streak. Rather than with Moskowitz' hypermasculinity, I juxtapose sophisticated-*wen* with martial-*wu*. Whereas *wen* masculinity dominates mainstream pop, the *wu* masculinity of horse-riding knight-errants 武俠, invincible kung fu masters and fearless mafiosi has inspired pop's challengers, including Beijing rock musicians, Hong Kong rappers, and Taiwanese musicians singing in Taiwanese rather than Mandarin.<sup>52</sup> Hanggai, LMF and Wu Bai are just three striking, relatively recent examples of male artists that couple macho-*wu* to a predominantly rock sound. The rise of male singers in Hong Kong of the 1960s and in Taiwan of the late 1970s was enabled by the introduction in pop music of elements associated with masculinity: band organization, rock and folk sounds and criticality.<sup>53</sup> Later, I will discuss loyalty and *wu* masculinity in the Beijing band scene; but first I will investigate images of being cool and tough in mainstream pop – images that empower both men and women.

### Faye Wong's Cool

As opposed to the *yin*-related concept of beauty, cool is closer to *yang*. The Chinese *ku* 酷 is a transliteration of the English *cool* and first appeared in Taiwan during the 1970s.

<sup>50</sup> Cinematographer Christopher Doyle writes in a section called "Leslie Needs Love" about the shooting of a drag-scene that was eventually dropped from the final cut:

Leslie looks great as a red-head, but the darker, modified 'bouffon' is far less 'obvious'. Mother of pearl sunglasses camp him up a bit in high-heels he walks like trick-tired whore.

The make-up looks pasty like a weekend cross-dresser-hide stubble fake.

We like the ensemble. But Leslie is ill at ease ...

"Am I a woman? A real woman?" he asks his mirror more than us.

"You look great Leslie." We all try to sound re-assuring, "Not the slightest bit 'camp'." We stop just short of "Leslie, you're beautiful." I'm sure he can manage to say that much himself (Doyle 1996:40).

<sup>51</sup> Žižek 1992:70, Cf. Žižek 1997:108.

<sup>52</sup> On these latter, see Moskowitz 2010:35-37.

<sup>53</sup> Erni 2004:5-6.

In the PRC it replaced *xiaosa* 潇洒, 'natural and unrestrained,' during the 1990s, introducing stronger connotations of liberalism, such as independence, individuality and indifference. My argument that Faye Wong was crucial in this transition builds on her uneasy relation to stardom and the press as well as her affinities with alternative sounds. I will develop this argument further toward the end of this chapter.

PRC scholars argue that *ku* is at odds with Chinese traditional and official concepts of beauty 美 and perfection 完美, which are seen as the optimistic emulation of and obeisance to a collective ideal.<sup>54</sup> Wang Bin:

Presently [1998], *ku* has become a widespread format in the cultural market. Many in the film and music business ... wrongly assume that cold beauty 冷艷 is an artistic accomplishment, and lack of facial expression is art. ...

*Ku* essentially means being a clone filled with the loneliness, frustration and anxiety produced by the present competitiveness. The young generation shouldn't be one of coldness, of perversion. Neither should they see the perverted *ku* as an avant-garde style.<sup>55</sup>

Jeff Smith and Jean Wylie's 2004 article "China's Youth Defining 'Cool'" does not question the cultural translatability of *cool*, but the issue comes up in the survey of 1,200 university students on which the article is based:

We asked the students, "In one sentence please describe what you mean by 'cool'." Just under half of male and female respondents in both Beijing and Shanghai indicated that individuality and innovation make a company cool.

...

Though foreign brands scored near the top in many survey categories, music is one area where they fell short. Asian, not Western, musicians are viewed as cool by this generation. No international pop stars were among students' top 10 favorites. China's Wang Fei [Faye Wong] was the most popular singer, with 17% of the votes.<sup>56</sup>

Additionally, a 1998 Shanghai Radio survey of 6,000 people revealed Aaron Kwok as the coolest male singer, Faye Wong as the coolest female singer and Pepsi-Cola as the coolest drink.<sup>57</sup> The mention of Pepsi is salient because ever since its debut on the Chinese market in 1982, the brand has collaborated extensively with Chinese pop stars to create a cool image. Their campaigns illustrate the travels of this Afro-American notion in Asia.

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<sup>54</sup> Zhou 2005:33.

<sup>55</sup> Wang 2001:4.

<sup>56</sup> Smith 2004:2-3.

<sup>57</sup> Gao 2006.

In the 1980s, Pepsi campaigned globally with superstars such as Michael Jackson and Madonna, and in Chinese-language areas – starting with Hong Kong – with Leslie Cheung and later Andy Lau. In the early 1990s Pepsi collaborated with another ‘Heavenly God’ of Cantonese pop music, Aaron Kwok, during their new campaign around the slogan 渴望無限, ‘boundless yearning’, a translation of their global slogan ‘Ask for more.’ In 1999 Faye Wong recorded the song EXCELLENCE 精彩 to promote the slogan, and in recent years the brand has continued to seek endorsement by pop stars, including Sammi Cheng and Jay Chou.

The lyrics of EXCELLENCE express the shift of an esthetics of perfection to one of sublime coolness:

最好有心理准备  
拯救灵魂的枯萎  
你和我还有机会  
拨乱反正 弄清是非

You’d better be prepared  
to redeem your soul’s withering.  
You and I still have a chance  
to shatter rights and wrongs, to sort out true and false.

你渴望 我期待  
美好灿烂的未来  
不完美 也要精彩  
可怎么做的说的想的要的不止那么多

You yearn for, I look forward to  
the bright and brilliant future.  
Perfect or not, excelling is a must,  
but how to do it, say it, think it, want it,  
doesn’t matter so much.

每一刻都存在  
不一样的精彩  
每一刻都存在  
不一样的精彩

Every moment exists...  
a different excellence.  
Every moment exists...  
a different excellence.

爱总是左右难为  
梦永远是种点缀  
你和我 坚持过几回  
偶而妥协 拒绝后悔

Love is always elusive and difficult,  
an eternal embroidery of dreams.  
You and I have persisted sometimes,  
compromise occasionally, refuse to regret.

### Jay Chou’s Diao-Phallus

Since Faye Wong stopped recording studio albums in 2003, Jay Chou has been the prime example of a cool pop star. However, Chou himself rather opts for *diao* 屌 as the secret of his success.<sup>58</sup> From *Time Asia*’s 2003 cover story *Cool Jay*:

Finally, he leans in close: “Let me tell you about diao.”

Diao is Taiwanese slang usually translated as “cool” or “outrageous.” It literally means “penis.”

<sup>58</sup> Since it is oral slang, written representations vary: 屌, 吊 and DIAO are all used.

“It’s my personal philosophy,” he explains, “but it has nothing to do with religion. It means that whatever you do, you don’t try to follow others. Go your own way, you know?”

He sits back, shakes his hair out of his eyes and nods. This is serious. This is deep. This is the metaphysical mechanism that he feels explains his pop stardom, as opposed to his musical talent. “It’s like, the ability to shock. The way I think of shocking people is to do things that people don’t expect in my music, in my performances. Like during my first Taipei show last year, I was performing Long Quan (Dragon Fist) (Chou’s favorite tune from his Eight Dimensions CD [(2002)]) and I took off on a harness and flew out over the audience. That was diao.”<sup>59</sup>

The lyrics of *DRAGON FIST* (2002) are full of macho Chinese imagery.<sup>60</sup> The video clip strengthens the *wu* heroism and brands Pepsi. It starts with kung fu monks dressed in blue pants practicing moves to a Chinese drum intro in a monastery called Dragon *Wu* Academy 龍武館. As the master leaves, saying “This is for you,” and distorted electric guitars play the main harmony of the song, Jay Chou jumps in mid-air to catch the nameplate of the monastery. Next he uses his superhuman powers to reveal a hidden refrigerator stashed with blue cans. The monks cheer, and run up to the camera. Jay Chou starts summing up Chinese cultural symbols in the verse. The bridge links the rise of China to a transformation of masculinity:

渴望著血脈相通無限個千萬弟兄我把天地拆封將長江水掏空  
人在古老河床蛻變中～～

我 右拳打開了天化身為龍

把 山河重新移動填平裂縫  
將 東方的日出調整了時空



Illustration 3.8: Jay Chou in the video clip of *DRAGON FIST* (2002).

Yearning to be united in blood with endless<sup>61</sup> millions of brothers, I tear apart the universe’s seal, drain the Yangtze river.  
Man is mutating on ancient river beds!

My right hand opens heaven.  
I transform into a dragon,  
grab landscapes for remobilizing, balances crack.  
Let the Oriental sunrise reconfigure time-space

<sup>59</sup> Drake 2003.

<sup>60</sup> The lyrics are by Chou’s main lyricist Vincent Fang.

<sup>61</sup> Subtle reference to Pepsi’s slogan 渴望無限 ‘endless yearning.’

回到洪荒 去支配 去操縱

back to primordial chaos, to domination,  
to manipulation.

我 右拳打開了天化身為龍

My right hand opens heaven,  
I transform into a dragon.

那 大地心臟洶湧不安跳動  
全 世界的表情只剩下一種  
等待英雄 我就是那個龍

That earth's heart churns, pounds restlessly,  
the whole world's expression narrowed to one.  
Await the hero. I am that dragon.

The title of the song is reminiscent of the Japanese anime series *Dragon Ball-Z*, and the rest of the clip pictures Jay Chou as a super kung fu hero fighting cartoon monsters. Yu Liang makes grateful use of *DRAGON FIST* and its visual presentation in commercials, clips and fan-made Internet animations to accuse Jay Chou of being a child only interested in playing 玩, entertaining dreams of egotistic heroism that go against the true *wu* values of loyalty and are therefore un-Chinese.<sup>62</sup> However, not only was *DRAGON FIST* selected by a USA soft drink company, in 2004 Jay Chou also performed it on the major PRC state television event, the CCTV Chinese New Year show. CCTV had no problem with the prominence of the ego-hero in the song, and only demanded that Chou articulate better.<sup>63</sup>

Chou combines tough *wu*-masculinity with a traditional view of the family and romanticism in a way that is reminiscent of clichéd Mediterranean machismo, romanticism and family values. At times this brings Jay Chou close to *wen* masculinity, in his many R&B ballads, through the milk-drinking cowboy he portrays in *ON THE RUN*, “coz beer harms the body,” and in *LISTEN TO MOTHER 聽媽媽的話* (2006) when he shares with a young fan the Confucian mantra of obeisance to seniors.

Host: “Can you describe yourself in one sentence?”

Chou: “Super diao.” ...

Host: “What do you like best in a man?”

Chou: “Individuality.”

Host: “And what about women?”

Chou: “They shouldn’t be too individual. I want girls to be reliant, of the dependent little bird type.”

Host: “What do you think is most important in a friend?”

Chou: “To believe in brotherly loyalty 義氣”

Host: “The *ku*-lest scene in *The Curse of the Golden Flower* 黃金甲 (2006, d. Zhang Yimou)?”

Chou: “The ending with all the soldiers and horses fighting and murdering. I like the aesthetics of violence best.” ...

<sup>62</sup> Yu 2005a, Yu 2005b.

<sup>63</sup> CCTV 2004, around 23:30. Jay Chou did add a sword dance and the first sentence of the *wen*-student Liang Shanbo in the ‘Chinese Romeo and Juliet’ *The Butterfly Lovers* 梁山伯與祝英台.

Host: “Why did you bring your mother to see *The Curse of the Golden Flower*?”

Chou: “Because my mum likes seeing Slick-Hair Chow.”

Host: “Is there anything you want to say to your mother at this moment?”

Chou: “Thanks for having me.”<sup>64</sup>

## §5 Rivals and Brothers

Baranovitch interprets the “the fascination with the macho, Rambo-like, tough, masculine image among Chinese rockers” in the PRC as a reaction against the gender-erasure of the Revolutionary Era (1949-1978).<sup>65</sup> In the 1980s, male intellectuals in the PRC sought to assert their power and *wu*-masculinity. However, the 1989 massacre “was an act of castration whose purpose it was to place China’s intellectuals back in their traditional position of woman-like state subjects.”<sup>66</sup> The official acceptance of popular music (first as *tongsu*) since 1986 helped in “fostering nonrebellious, obedient, docile male state-subjects.”<sup>67</sup> In other words, according to Baranovitch, rock’s rebelliousness is not only political, but also sexual. I have addressed (political) rebelliousness in the previous chapter. Rather than addressing rock’s sexual subversion directly, I will now outline the style and importance of male bonding in the Beijing band scene.

### Homosociality

The metal band Tang Dynasty are generally seen as “emblems of patriotism and Chinese masculinity,” as Cynthia Wong writes:

[Kaiser] Kuo reveled in his “womanizing rock star” persona ... [he] was a great rock guitar player and to top it all off, he was a sex object.<sup>68</sup>

Tang Dynasty present themselves as objects/causes of desire, and at the same time reenact *wu* masculine ideals of brotherhood. Intrigued by knight-errant plots, they called their second album *Epic* in English, a free translation of its Chinese title *yanyi* 演義 ‘performing righteousness,’ with righteousness traditionally referring to loyalty among brothers.<sup>69</sup> Kaiser Kuo:

We all had long hair and we were big, tall guys. One day, we [guitar player Ding, bass player Zhang Ju and guitarist Kaiser Kuo] got the idea that it would be cool to pull our hair up in topknots, like men used to in the ancient days, so we got these strips of leather and tied it up. We walked around the city [of Beijing] like

<sup>64</sup> Zhang 2006.

<sup>65</sup> Baranovitch 2003:118, 133.

<sup>66</sup> Baranovitch 2003:141.

<sup>67</sup> Baranovitch 2003:142.

<sup>68</sup> Wong 2005:153, 179. Cf. De Kloet 2010:55-56.

<sup>69</sup> For more on the centrality of *yi* to *wu* masculinity, see Louie 2002:36-37. See Wong 2005:185 on Kuo’s choice of *Epic* over *Romance* in the English caption of the album.

that all day. We joked that we were the three blood brothers [of the *Sanguo Yanyi* 三國演義, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*].<sup>70</sup>

The Beijing band scene of the 1990s was based on homosocial relationships that empowered (ideologically) male insiders at the cost of estranging outsiders and especially women. Cynthia Wong experienced difficulties doing fieldwork for her PhD. In her introduction she quotes Kuo as saying: “Cynthia, you are so stupid! If a woman just comes up and talks to me, I think she wants to fuck me.”

In other words, this code of righteousness values the bond between men over that between a man and a woman, in a similar way to Savigliano’s characterization of tango:

Tango is not about sex – at least not about heterosexuality – it is about love, but love and sensuality (according to our previous informants) are queer preoccupations. Hence, macho men only care about the true passion of male friendship ... and they are obsessed by the judgments of their male peers ... which, in turn, frequently revolve around their ways of relating to woman.<sup>71</sup>

In the discussion of Xiao He’s SIMPLE TRUTH at the beginning of this chapter, I focused on the performer/protagonist and his desired Lady. However, the canso include a third, male party, which anticipates the role of the audience.<sup>72</sup> Xiao He doesn’t perform SIMPLE TRUTH for his Lady but for the audience, whose indispensability is illustrated by the fact that the song was recorded live. SIMPLE TRUTH is an invitation to collectively heap abuse on the Lady, to feel relieved from wanting her and to feel protected by a collective that structurally has the upper hand, i.e. is in the *yang*-position.<sup>73</sup>

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick starts her book on male homosocial relations in English literature by

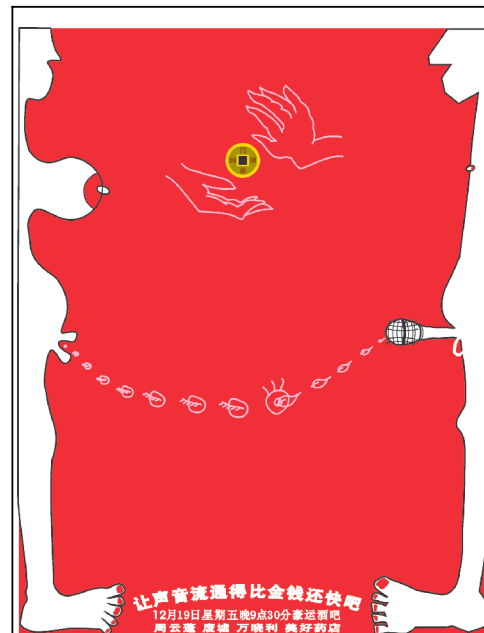


Illustration 3.9: Poster of a show of Zhou Yunpeng, Ruins, Wan Xiaoli and Glorious Pharmacy in the Get Lucky bar on December 19<sup>th</sup> 2003. The slogan at the bottom reads “Let sound circulate faster than money.”

<sup>70</sup> Wong 2005:171. To Tang Dynasty, “height becomes yet another means of constructing and asserting their masculinity” (Baranovitch 2003:118).

<sup>71</sup> Savigliano 1995:45.

<sup>72</sup> Cholakian 1990:1.

<sup>73</sup> Even Xiao He. His almost inaudible “sorry” before his final “the world however won’t stop turning, because you’re gone” can be taken literally as the apology of a bohemian for not abiding by the Law-of-the-Father.

proposing the erotic triangle.<sup>74</sup> She warns that this erotic triangle is neither symmetrical nor ahistorical, and consequently Song Geng argues:

Although the “erotic triangle” in Sedgwick’s sense also exists in Chinese literature, the homosocial relationship in traditional Chinese culture was characterized by the absence of women. What ties men together, in most cases, was the ideological articulation of justice and righteousness ... [Moreover,] since heterosexual love poses a threat to the bonds among men, the homosocial discourse adopts a hostile attitude toward woman and heterosexuality.<sup>75</sup>

Song Geng contrasts this discourse of male loyalty and knight errants with the ‘talent and beauty’ story.<sup>76</sup> Below I will investigate the conflict between homosocial loyalty and heterosexual desire, which Baranovitch calls “the crisis of masculinity.”<sup>77</sup>

## The Gap between Loyalty and Desire

Where Tang Dynasty (and more recently Hanggai) elicit identification with the mythical *wu* man, both *The Master Says* and *Second Hand Rose* sing of the displacement of brotherhood 兄弟 in contemporary China. For *The Master Says*, the primary site of righteousness is not an on-stage macho pose, but lyrical description of friends talking and drinking. VESSEL 磁器 (1997) is still an outright celebration of brotherhood: it sings of brothers as “potatoes cooked to mash” and “figures made of the same clay.” *THE WAY OF WINE* 酒道 (1997) is more critical:

活著是為錢兒啊？	Do you live for money?
死了那是為道！	You death, well, that’s because of the Way!
世態人情薄似紗，	Attitudes and emotions are slight as gauze.
要是自個兒跌倒了得自個兒爬，	If you fall by yourself, you have to pick yourself up.
莫靠拉！	No support!
交了許多的好朋友，	I made lots of good friends,
全是烟、酒、茶，	all with cigarettes, wine, tea.
一旦有事兒去找他...	But if once you knock on their door for help...
他不在家，他不在家	he’s not at home, he’s not at home.

*The Master Says* hardly ever invite straightforward identification with a protagonist. They maintain a critical distance through a combination of maxims, ridicule, references

<sup>74</sup> Sedgwick uses ‘homosocial desire,’ but I prefer the term ‘homosocial relationships’ to avoid confusion with the Lacanian notion of desire I use throughout this chapter (Sedgwick 1985:21).

<sup>75</sup> Song 2004:174-5. Sedgwick argues that the erotic triangle is only “for making graphically intelligible *the play of desire and identification* by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment” (Sedgwick 1985:27, italics added).

<sup>76</sup> Despite proposing an exciting reading of *The Western Chamber* as increasingly constructed around male rivalry (as transposed social antagonism), with Oriole Cui symbolizing fame.

<sup>77</sup> Baranovitch 2003:112. De Kloet 2010:104-105.

to social perception (marriage, sacrifice), wordplay and shifts in focalization. NIMA NAGE 妮玛娜格(2002) deals with the aftermath of a divorce: Qiu Ye first sings about “releasing all my fiery passion 欲火” in a guitar solo, and then recounts his attempts at pacifying his sexual frustration in a karaoke bar. A chorus of escort ladies sings a nursery rhyme in which they ridicule the protagonist for his poverty, crudely interrupting this fantasy. Consequently we don’t get the protagonist’s reaction, but a patronizing speech by an unknown “older brother” who is most likely employed by the karaoke parlor/brothel:

大哥起身慢細語說是  
二弟二弟別生氣  
這妹妹本是良家的  
迫於生活才  
咱們出來耍的一定要  
懂得憐香惜玉  
二弟誒你沒問題  
她這妹妹沒問題

Big brother gets up, speaks slowly and carefully.  
‘Don’t be angry, little brother.  
In fact, this sister came from a respectable family  
only ‘cause she was forced to make a living...  
We who come to fool around surely should know  
how to comfort the fragrant.  
Little brother, hey, you’ve got no problem.  
This sister, she’s got no problem.’

The song NIMA NAGE, as well as the escort lady of that name in the song, shows the complexities of loyalty and desire in contemporary Chinese society. It ends with big brother calmly repeating “no problem” now and then as the singer screams frantically over a parodied disco beat, indicating the emotional despair of participating in the debauchery of modern society. The protagonist of the song is a victim of the erosion of ideals (divorce, cold economics), but he also actively participates in it by frequenting the karaoke bars and discos. Rock music serves as a release for anxiety and frustration, but songs like NIMA NAGE also reproach men, albeit indirectly, for their impotence and weakness.

## Most Luscious

Whereas the soap opera *Migrant Workers of Subsistence* 生存之民工 (2005, d. Guan Hu) is melodramatic, Second Hand Rose’s end-credit track song FATE (SUBSISTENCE) 命運 (生存) treats the suffering of migrant people through tragicomedy.<sup>78</sup> The upbeat song starts with a wife whining “Oh, fate!” and the rest of the lyrics are true to the humor of the Northeast cabaret tradition of Two-Taking-Turns. A flash-media clip of the song depicts a poor guy getting increasingly hyperbolic beatings after time and again failing to take revenge on a mafia boss (with the characters dressed as stock figures of Hong Kong *wu*-dominated film genres), only to finally succeed and end up in jail.

Second Hand Rose goes beyond *The Master Says* by ridiculing *wu* masculinity directly. This farcicality 嬉皮滑稽, as Huang Liaoyuan calls it, is consistent with the

<sup>78</sup> The intro shows migrant workers complaining over indefinitely delayed payments, ending with premier Wen Jiabao addressing the central issue: “Enterprises and managers that refuse to pay back wages to migrant rural workers must be held accountable in accordance with the law.” The series is set in Northeast China, features Two-Taking-Turns performances and stars Xue Cun.

clowning and double-entendres of Two-Taking-Turns and with Second Hand Rose's challenge to the rock mythology.<sup>79</sup> In REVELATIONS OF A QUEST FOR MARRIAGE 征婚启示 (2003), Liang Long sings of himself as impregnated by an artist and by art.

Playfully addressing sexuality also benefits Second Hand Rose's marketability. For the small-scale Plug One Half 插一半 Show on Valentine's Day 2009, they advertised with the following entrance fees:

Couples: married 100, lovers 90, homosexuals 80, extra-marital affairs 70, twice-married 60.

Singles: 50.

Tickets come with a free 'Trojan Horse' condom.

I will address humor in the next chapter. Behind their parodies and cynicism, what is Second Hand Rose's take on masculinity and its crisis?

FATE (SUBSISTENCE) cynically portrays today's world as a dangerous place comparable to the mythical *jianghu* 江湖 or 'marshes and lakes' through which knight-errants roam. The title song of their second album, ENTERTAINMENT *JIANGHU* 娛樂江湖 (2006), develops this theme to criticize the fierce competition in the entertainment industry. It starts with a nursery rhyme:

兩只小蜜蜂，飛在花叢中， Two little bees fly amongst the flowers.  
飛來又飛去，愛情一場空。 Flying left and right, love cannot be found.  
人在江湖飄，那能不挨刀， Men roam *jianghu* and can't avoid the sword.  
一刀砍死你，砍完砍自己。 Killing you in a single stroke, I'll start killing myself,

...

萬一是親戚呢 萬一是朋友呢 What if it's your relative, what if it's your friend?  
萬一是愛人呢 萬一是自己呢 What if it's your lover, what if it's yourself?

In contrast to the *jianghu* romanticized in knight-errant novels and kung fu cinema, Second Hand Rose use *jianghu* to argue that contemporary society lacks loyalty and love. *Wu* homosocial bonds have withered in contemporary China, and Second Hand Rose find this deplorable but inevitable. The title ENTERTAINMENT *JIANGHU* can also be read as 'enjoying *jianghu*.'

In their more serious moments, Second Hand Rose oscillate between a pathetic longing for idyllic love – under the virtual moonlight of PEACH ORCHARD OF THE E-ERA E時代桃園 (2006), where happiness and eternity are downloadable, and during the spring or erotic dreams of STORY OF SPRING 春天的故事 (2006) – on the one hand, and the perverse 'realism' of accepting a stand-in, on the other. "Wouldn't it be more heroic if we could live on love," sings Liang Long in PICKING FLOWERS (2003), a story of unexpected pregnan-

<sup>79</sup> Both in personal communication Huang Liaoyuan, August 2006, and New Vision 2006:18' 05.

cy, pragmatic marriage and the impossibility of predestined love.<sup>80</sup> At other moments Second Hand Rose temporarily solve the tension between desire and reality by offering music itself as a sublime fantasy that gives access to *jouissance* and shields off the traumatic real.<sup>81</sup> For instance the repeated “I’d like to sing you a song” of PICKING FLOWERS, the chorus of BUT I’M STILL SINGING 可是我还是在歌唱 (2006) and the theme of dancing in VOODOO DANCE 跳大神 (2006) celebrate the strength of musical performance as a metaphor for life.

Due to the absence of humor, GOOD FLOWER RED 好花紅(2003) combines aggressive male desire and beauty’s inaccessibility most clearly:

好花紅那個紅又艷呢	Good flower red, it’s red and gorgeous.
誰不願那個騙她入胸懷	Who doesn’t want to deceive her into his arms,
一層層扒下去讓嫩的露出來	stripping layer after layer, revealing the tender parts?
卻說情不變花也不會敗	Yet to say that love never changes
	is like saying flowers never succumb.

Usually, however Second Hand Rose question machismo through their prominent use of red roses, the slogan “the most luscious band in Chinese rock,” and the drag act of lead singer Liang Long.

At first I dressed up in a matchmaker’s outfit, the outfit of those meddlers that are go-betweens in marriages. I put my hair in a big bun and covered it with a net, one of those black hair-nets old ladies use. Painted a mole, both cheeks brightly red and I’d get on stage. Whenever I saw myself in the mirror I was shocked, and almost threw up. Very, very ugly, but also with the power to shock. A lot of people liked my [appearance] back then, saying it was extremely compelling 過癮. Later, well, we all love face, I wanted to make it more beautiful. So I gave it some thought. In Beijing, to me this dress expressed an attitude 狀態 of neither fish nor fowl 不伦不类. I didn’t know what kind of position my music had, in other words, how everyone would receive this kind of music. Moreover, at the time many concepts were vague 模糊 and confusing to me, for in-



Illustration 3.10: Promotional picture of Second Hand Rose, with Liang Long as Shanghai lady.

<sup>80</sup> The song was originally written for a girl that passed the rehearsal room (conversation, Liang Long).

<sup>81</sup> On the sublime, see Žižek 1989:202, 203, quoting Lacan’s definition: “an object raised to the level of the (impossible-real) Thing.”

stance good and bad, and heroes and villains. People were less and less willing to define these things, therefore I appeared in this (gender) neutral 中性 identity. So, [cross-]dressing was [a way of] representing myself. Later someone suggested that I could dress as a kind of Shanghai dancer. During the daytime she's eternally dispirited, only at night, thickly made-up, she experiences her existence.<sup>82</sup>

Compared to Leslie Cheung's RED, Liang Long's drag is far from the materialization of beauty that offers him/herself as an object of desire. As parody, it simultaneously mocks the need for such romantic fantasies (aligning itself safely with homophobia) and re-enacts them (opening the possibility of sexual transgression). Humor, parody and ambivalence enable Second Hand Rose to address risqué desires, which is one of their main attractions.

## §6 Over the Moon

From SIMPLE TRUTH and GOOD FLOWER RED to Jay Chou's debut single LOVELY LADY 可爱女人 (2000) and Cui Jian's FLOWERHOUSE GIRL 花房姑娘 (1999), many men have sung about maddeningly unattainable beauties. Baranovitch writes:

[In FLOWERHOUSE GIRL Cui Jian] constructs a female image that is more powerful than himself ... The female other is a static creature who uses her sexuality to domesticate the dynamic male self [which] becomes a captive who loses his individuality and freedom.<sup>83</sup>

This dangerous femininity ties in with both the fit of infatuation *wen*-men fall prey to when they encounter beauties such as Oriole Cui, and the misogyny typical of *wu* masculinity, which values brotherhood and coolness. Although this erotic triangle addresses the Lady, it is the bond between men that defines its structure. The plot excludes the object of desire from the male-dominated public domain of "the ideological articulation of justice and righteousness," in Song Geng's words.<sup>84</sup> The Lady does not even have the choice between acceptance and rejection: she can only passively accept the rejecting role.

Given the dominance of men behind the scenes, female singers are primarily present in their voice and image. Mladen Dolar explains that the voice potentially challenges the Law-of-the-Father because it suggests excess:

The voice beyond words is a senseless play of sensuality, it possesses a dangerous attractive force, although in itself it is empty and frivolous. The dichotomy of voice and *logos* is already in place.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> New Vision 2006:16'16–17'24.

<sup>83</sup> Baranovitch 2003:124.

<sup>84</sup> Song 2004: 174.

<sup>85</sup> Dolar 2006:43.

The excess of *jouissance* in (sung) music can only be tolerated when it simultaneously subjects itself to the symbolic order, often explicitly through lyrical content. The mandapop of Zhou Xuan and Teresa Teng is full of *yin-jouissance* – singing, directing desire – while being obedient to the *yang* order of *logos*. The thinness of the dividing line between the positive qualification *wenxin* 溫馨, ‘warm and fragrant,’ and the negative *momo zhi yin* 靡靡之音, ‘sounds of decadence,’ was evidenced by a short period of censorship.<sup>86</sup> In this fragile balance, the moon is an accepted stand-in for female sexuality. As such it provides a convenient vantage point for the present analysis of traditional mandapop love songs.

## The Moon For My Heart

Su Zheng writes in “Female Heroes and Moonish Lovers”:

[In art songs of the 1920s New Culture movement] often women’s existence can only be understood metaphorically through other objects such as the moon, water, flowers, or clouds. The moon, which in Chinese culture represents the feminine, soft, romantic, and desirable but hard to reach, was clearly the most favoured metaphor to portray female lovers.<sup>87</sup>

THE MOON FOR MY HEART is Teresa Teng’s most famous song:<sup>88</sup>

你問 我愛 你有 多深	You ask me how deeply I love you,
我愛 你有 幾分?	how much I love you?
我的情 也真 我的愛 也真	My feelings are true, and so is my love.
月亮代 表我 的 心。	The moon for my heart.
你問 我愛 你有 多深	You ask me how deeply I love you,
我愛 你有 幾分?	how much I love you?
我的情 不移 我的愛 不變	My feelings won’t waver, my love won’t change.
月亮代 表我 的 心。	The moon for my heart.
輕 輕 的一 個 吻,	Lightly a kiss
已經打 動我 的 心。	already resonates in my heart.

<sup>86</sup> Li 1993, Wu 1982 and the prize-winning newspaper article Anonymous 1982. See also Steen 2000, and Jones 2001: 114-117 for an explanation of ‘decadent sound’ (indebted to Mittler’s *Dangerous Tunes*, which goes strangely unmentioned) and its uses in the condemnation of 1930s Shanghai pops: “Nie Er’s revolt against his teacher [Li Jinhui] represents just such a deployment of a signficatory scheme in which the feminine is likened to frivolity, decadence, and degradation, and the masculine to probity, righteous struggle, and the nation.”

<sup>87</sup> Zheng 1996:108. Shi (2006) argues that Chinese traditional music, folk and pop should be seen as feminine (as opposed to Western masculinity).

<sup>88</sup> The original was composed by Weng Ching-Hsi, with lyrics by Sun Yizhen, and recorded by Chen Fenlan in 1972. However, only with Liu Guanlin’s version did it become a hit. Teresa Teng recorded it in 1977. See also Yeh (2005) for a scholarly account of the unifying power of this song for Chinese all over the world. Cf. Baranovitch 2003:10-11 for a description.

深深的一段情，	A deep, deep romance,
教我思念到如今。	it's in my mind to this day.
你問我愛你有多深	You ask me how deeply I love you,
我愛你有幾分？	how much I love you?
你去想一想 你去看一看	Just think it over and look around...
月亮代表我的心。	The moon for my heart.

The central question of this song is the obvious one: what does Teng mean by singing “the moon for my heart,” literally: “the moon represents my heart”? The calm, regular rhythm and the soft delivery give the song the air of a lullaby, presenting a promise of enduring (sexual) commitment, backed by the moon as a celestial certainty. But the moon is also enigmatic; its waxing and waning are a potential source of anxiety. The voiceless lover doesn’t get a straight answer to his repeated question, and is teased by the suggestion into finding his own answers or abandoning his demand for clarity altogether. Perhaps he enters the mirage of a tryst, or perhaps the moon signifies a third distant point on which the lovers can focus, diminishing differences and the need for definite answers. Su Zheng writes:

As a subject of desire, women in these songs, however, are formless and illusory, transcending their own embodied existence and sexuality. Not only has women’s sexual identity been transformed into asexual cosmic objects, but in these romantic love songs, even their gender identity is often treated as indeterminate or ambiguous.<sup>89</sup>

THE MOON FOR MY HEART primarily conveys a romantic feeling (‘that which takes place under the moon’) without clear markers of gender. True, the moon suggests *yin*, but that has not stopped men from recording their versions of the song. Earlier I mentioned Leslie Cheung’s tender rendition. The version the male singer Chyi Chin recorded on *Mystery of a Century Love Songs* 世紀情歌之迷 (1999) stands out for its fragility. The pathos of piano and Chyi Chin’s voice on the verge of breaking erupts, halfway through the song, into a vortex of violins, electric guitar, bass and drums.

David Tao reinterprets THE MOON FOR MY HEART as a chorus in the R&B song MOON OVER YOUR HEART 月亮代表誰的心 (2002).<sup>90</sup> The first verse ends with “a crescent moon watches us going mad with love 愛的痴狂, no need to talk about promises,” after which the chorus doesn’t speak of unchanging love, but of love’s truthfulness to the moment. Moreover, in the final chorus Tao turns the tables, singing “I ask you how much you love me” and “the moon for whose heart.” In contrast to THE MOON FOR MY HEART, MOON OVER

<sup>89</sup>Zheng 1996:108. See also Daly 2005:135 on ‘die dritten Sache’ and Žižek 2006:355-356 on the traumatic nature of direct love.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Moskowitz 2010:93-95.

YOUR HEART posits that actual and physical relations are waxing and waning like the moon, while memories are for eternity.

The re-use of THE MOON FOR MY HEART by these and many other male and female artists shows the versatility of this and many other mandapop and cantopop songs, also in terms of gender. This gender versatility suggests a focus on romantic love beyond any actualization, as an object of desire in itself.<sup>91</sup>

Faye Wong did not include a version of THE MOON FOR MY HEART on *Decadent Sounds*, her Teresa Teng cover album.<sup>92</sup> However, THAT MOMENT'S MOON 当时的月亮 on *Only Love Strangers* (1999) quotes the song:

回頭

Turn around and

看 當時的月亮 曾經代表誰的心 結果都一樣

See that moment's moon. It once stood for whose heart? The result is all the same.

看 當時的月亮 一夜之間化做今天的 陽光

See that moment's moon. In a night it consumed today's sunshine.

誰能告訴我哪一種 信仰能夠讓 人 念念不忘

Who can tell me what religion can make one remember and never forget?

當時如果沒有甚麼 當時如果擁有甚麼 又會怎樣

At that moment if there'd been nothing, at that moment if there'd been something: then what?

Anachronistically, we could read THAT MOMENT'S MOON as a reaction to David Tao's MOON OVER YOUR HEART. The protagonist in Wong's song accepts the transient nature of the romance and ends up eulogizing the eternally sweet memory over any results in reality. On first hearing, the song fits the mandapop tradition of female obedience to the male gaze. However, there is a subversive potential in the indifference of the protagonist. The romantic emotion is enough for her, she doesn't need lovers, nor should they expect to constitute a strong presence in her idealized memories. The last words of the song, rendered as *then what*, can be interpreted as stressing curiosity: "What would it be like?" and cynically, as meaning "What would it matter?" In the next pages I will investigate this ambiguity and consider how Faye Wong's sound-image-text hovers between obedient fatalism on the one hand and mild feminism on the other, through autonomy, childishness and duality.

### The More Beautiful, the More I Cannot Touch

Anthony Fung and Michael Curtin comment on Faye Wong's debut hit EASILY HURT WOMAN (1991):

<sup>91</sup> Erni 2004:14-15. For a list of renditions, see Jia 2006.

<sup>92</sup> She did sing it live, and the album contains other moon imagery, such as SO LET US FOR A LONG TIME... 但願人長久, mentioned in Chapter 1.

It is the woman's inability to take positive action in a relationship that is naturalized as a fundamental quality of feminine romance in Chinese heterosexual relationships. ... Faye's success furthermore resonated with stereotypes of the ideal Hong Kong woman that circulated widely in other media – outwardly career-orientated while inwardly still serving the family.<sup>93</sup>

EASILY HURT WOMAN and similar songs couple lyrics expressing dramatic fatalism to the sound of the traditional *gangtai* ballad, which is structured around the controlled eruption of emotional crises (often through the use of strings) and a return to normalcy in a coda at the end of the song. Many of the songs are in a three-quarter beat.<sup>94</sup> Prime examples are I AM WILLING (1994APR) and CHESS PIECE 棋子 (1994NOV). In the latter, Faye Wong calls herself a pawn in the hands of her lover/master: “I wanted to escape the domain under your control, but walked into the battleground you prepared” and “None of my moves is caused by myself.” A less explicit example is UNDERCURRENT (1997FEB):

就算  
even if  
就算  
even if  
讓這  
let this  
近你的  
close to your  
害怕  
afraid  
歷  
his-  
其實  
really  
仍  
still  
然後  
and then

天空再深 看不出 裂痕 眉頭 仍聚滿密雲  
heaven'd be deeper I couldn't see the fault line brows still gathering denser clouds  
一屋暗燈 照不穿 我身 仍可 反映 你心  
a layer of dim light's unable to shine through my body it still can reflect your mind  
口煙跳昇 我身軀 下沉 曾多麼想多麼想貼 近你的  
puff of smoke rise up and my body sink there was a time I wanted so much so much to be close to your  
心和眼口 和耳亦沒緣份我都捉 不 緊 害怕  
heart and eye mouth and ear that too wasn't meant to be I can't even hold on tight afraid  
悲劇重演 我的命中命中越美麗 的東西我越不可碰 歷  
tragedy will reenact it's my fate my fate that the more beautiful something is the more I cannot touch his-  
史在重演 這麼煩囂城中沒理由相戀可以 沒有暗湧 其實  
tory reenacts in such nauseating cities there's no reason romantic encounters can avoid undercurrents really  
我再去愛 惜你又有何用難道這次我抱緊你未必落空 仍  
what use would it be if I'd go cherishing again how could my embracing you this time possibly not be loss and void still  
靜候著你 說我別錯用神 甚麼我都有 預感 然後  
waiting silently you tell me I shouldn't misuse the divine that over everything I have forebodings and then  
睜不開兩眼看命運光臨然後天空湧起密雲  
cannot open my eyes to face destiny's arrival and then again and again heaven wells of dense clouds

UNDERCURRENT fits the mandapop ballad described in the previous chapter. Wong sings many syllables to each chord, and the melody only gradually meanders to a high-pitched

<sup>93</sup> Fung 2002:269-270.

<sup>94</sup> Su Zheng notices a similar phenomenon in New Culture art songs (Zheng 1996:108, 114).

climax in the penultimate sentence (where the ‘you’ finally speaks, albeit indirectly), only to revert quickly to lower registers and its reminiscing. The song’s cyclic feel is supported by the fast-paced, repetitive piano pattern. UNDERCURRENT is almost gender neutral; Anthony Wong recorded a cover version using exactly the same lyrics. He did change the music: prominent drums, distorted guitars, a faster tempo, and a four-beat give the song a *yang* feel, changing UNDERCURRENT’s melancholic fatalism into pronounced disbelief.

The fatalism of UNDERCURRENT is consistent with media reports of Wong’s love life, and especially her taste for macho boyfriends. Faye Wong married rocker Dou Wei (relationship since 1993, marriage 1996), gave birth to a daughter (1996), was divorced (1999), had a relationship with ‘bad boy’ Nicholas Tse who was 11 years younger (2000–2003), broke up, and remarried with the savvy actor Li Yapeng (relationship since 2003, marriage 2005), after which she retreated from the music business and had a second child (2006). Wong’s first two partners proved their lack of credibility by systematic adultery (Dou Wei, “too wild”) or by neglect and adultery (Nicolas Tse, “too young”).<sup>95</sup> In quasi-legal language, Faye Wong glosses over the adultery of her then-husband Dou Wei:

Everyone makes mistakes. If extra-marital love 情 should occur, I would first want to know the circumstances under which the other side commits mistakes. If it’s only play, there is no intention of abandoning the family and it’s only a temporary misstep, I will take these circumstances into account 酌情 and practice leniency. If he’s in love with the other, I won’t repent, I’ll stop struggling and won’t try to force what cannot be.<sup>96</sup>

Faye Wong’s relationships with macho *wu*-men, her patience with their adultery, the shampoo commercials with long wavy hair she recorded in 2000 and her many ballads constitute a *yin*-passive strand of dramatic fatalism in her gender identity.<sup>97</sup>

## Know Yourself

Whenever asked about her views on love 感情 she would reply without hesitation: “love is basically without intellect 不理智.” This expression conveys her attitude towards love and simultaneously reveals how well she knows herself. But sometimes she seems childish and unworldly 不諳世事.<sup>98</sup>

The section “There’s a Kind of Love Called Faye Wong” in *Biography in Pictures of Faye Wong* 王菲畫傳, from which this quote is taken, starts with Wong’s manager Katie

<sup>95</sup> Huang 2005:122–129. By 1996 it seemed Dou Wei had never discontinued his relationship with Gao Yuan, who apparently lived with him whenever Faye Wong was not in Beijing. In 2002 Nicolas Tse was involved in a car accident after singing karaoke and drinking with the young female star Cecilia Cheung (Huang 2005:168–173). However, only after repeated incidents did their relationship peter out.

<sup>96</sup> Huang 2005:117–118.

<sup>97</sup> A VCD with a making-of of a Head & Shoulders commercial was included in *Fable* (2000).

<sup>98</sup> Huang 2005:203.

Chan saying that Faye Wong's love is "of the sort of living and dying for him," tying in with an earlier comparison of Faye Wong to a "moth attracted to a flame."<sup>99</sup> Katie Chan, among other colleagues and friends, publicly disapproved of Faye Wong's romances (perhaps in general) and at some point apparently even told her she could not see Nicholas Tse.<sup>100</sup> Additionally, even Faye Wong's first husband Dou Wei seemed to have advised against it: "In fact, I don't have a good character, you should think twice before marrying me."<sup>101</sup>

But in matters of love, the public story is that Wong has a will of her own. Fung and Curtis interpret Faye Wong's love life as successful emancipation from the marketing logic of the Chinese music industry. She married twice, despite unwritten rules that celebrities should remain single.<sup>102</sup> Hong Kong megastar Andy Lau, for instance, only admitted to his relationship with Carol Chu in 2009, after keeping it secret for 24 years!

Rather than simply moving to a vantage point of feminism, I want to connect Wong's unyielding attitude in matters of love to the coolness I discussed above, and especially to her autonomy and self-absorbedness. Director Susie Au says:

In the final analysis clips are about the projection of a self, the self of the star. It's about exploring her fantasy, or my fantasy about her. After the first clips, I thought Faye Wong didn't need additional characters or props, she can carry a clip on her own. That started with *KNOW YOURSELF AND EACH OTHER* 知己知彼 [1994JUN] ... For the clip of *FACE* 臉 [2000], ... I wanted to distinguish between an opera Faye, based on her mother, and a rock Faye. The whole clip was about a play of identities, so I thought the audience should wear masks of Faye. However, it's important that there are people behind those masks: it should not be too narcissistic.<sup>103</sup>

Faye Wong's self-absorbedness is also evident from the fact that she has no dancers on stage and sings all of the backing vocals on her studio recording. Although her music leans on coolness, these elements of self-absorbedness translate this notion to Wong's specific stardom. Whereas coolness also has homosocial connotations of showing off in front of the guys or girls, Faye Wong's performances are worlds of their own that, despite their obvious theatrical and commercial frames, seem to have little need to please audiences.

<sup>99</sup> Huang 2005:202, reference to the lyrics of the song *RUSH FOR THE FIRE* 撲火 (Huang 2005:156, 158).

<sup>100</sup> Huang 2005:107, 152, 146.

<sup>101</sup> Huang 2005:107.

<sup>102</sup> Fung 2002:279.

<sup>103</sup> Conversation, Susie Au, July 2007.

## Androgyny

Chou Ch'ien-i pushes this point further by arguing that Faye Wong's world is divorced from outside reality to the extent that common-sensical concepts such as gender distinction no longer apply:

[The liner notes to *Mystery* 迷 (1994APR)] portray Faye Wong as an exceptional, mystical, uncontrollable and enigmatic woman. This enigma originates on the one hand from her break away from habitual interpretative frameworks of narratorship, and on the other hand through qualifications such as 'multilayered' and 'natural sense of propriety' that construct a different, unique logic that is Faye Wong's own—even though we don't know what that is. [The liner notes] continue describing her songs, combining both *yang*-style self-reliance [through terms such as] 'obstinacy,' 'calmness' and 'decisiveness' and *yin*-style tenderness [through terms such as] 'softness,' 'warmth' and 'saintly aureole.' This adds up to Faye Wong's both *yin* and *yang* 陰陽同體 (androgynous) [English in original] or (gender) neutral features. ...

In a number of pictures she wears skirts. Faye Wong's expression and posture show two characteristics. In the first place she never looks into the camera: either she bows her head slightly, staring at something in front of her; or she averts her face completely and shows the viewer only her hair. Secondly, Faye Wong doesn't smile in any of these pictures. She seems to be observing, feeling or pondering over something, or maybe she's just absent-minded. To a certain extent these two characteristics craft an image of Faye Wong as a lonesome cool lady who is divorced from, disregarding of and even antagonistic to the outside world of society. Through a detached and self-enclosed posture, this kind of image subverts the patriarchal visual tradition that pleases the male gaze.<sup>104</sup>

Besides liner notes, posture and dress, Chou also refers to Faye Wong's unfeminine short hairstyle. Chou shows that Wong suggests an inner world that is autonomous and enigmatic, eternally outside of the grasp of the male-dominated world of responsibility and work. The gender neutrality of the 'you' that Faye Wong addresses in her love songs and the increasingly abstract and cryptic nature of her lyrics in the course of the 1990s are consistent with this inclination towards androgyny.



Illustration 3.11: Faye Wong on the cover of her 1994 album *Mystery* 迷.

<sup>104</sup> Chou 1998.

## Childishness

In contrast to what Anthony Fung argues, I see Wong's androgyny less as a tactic to appeal to both sexes and more as a part of her childlike, autonomous and cool star persona.<sup>105</sup> Wong's youthfulness renders her desirable, and fuels the more or less conscious idolization of *having* Faye Wong. But her youthfulness also suggests the uncomplicatedly sunny days of childhood, offering fans opportunities to imagine *being* Faye Wong.

The commercial and video clip of *EXCELLENCE* contrast a young Faye Wong in school uniform with the established pop star, reminiscent of Michael Jackson's *NEW GENERATION* (1984) and Madonna's *LIKE A PRAYER* (1989) commercials. Unlike the emphasis in those clips, the accent is not on slick choreography: "In typical Faye style, she frolics like a flower child rather than dances," as Fung and Curtin put it.<sup>106</sup> Hence the crux of the juxtaposition is not the American dream that every schoolgirl can gain control over her body, and hence her destiny. Conversely, the clip shows that Faye Wong has not grown up – the playful girl is still inside her. The colorful images of Faye Wong flying and floating relate directly to the bird the young girl releases in the schoolyard.

Faye Wong's love life and motherhood have only thrown her youthfulness into relief. The idealization of Faye Wong's motherhood started with the use of paparazzi pictures of a barely recognizably pregnant Faye Wong on the cover of her EP *Toy* 玩具 (1997FEB). The baby's voice was subsequently used on *CHILD* 童, the last track of *Scenic Tour*, which was composed by Dou Wei, the father. The lyrics by Lam Chik celebrate the joy of loving a baby. Only the title and the widely known context make clear that the baby is a child rather than a lover. The ambiguity between parental and romantic love is even stronger in the title track of *Only Love Strangers* 只愛陌生人 (1999), which features samples of Dou Jingtong's baby talk and lyrics that eulogize love "more naive than a pet." Through these songs, Faye Wong successfully redirected her motherhood from a story of growing up that potentially threatened her popularity toward a tale of rejuvenation.



## Ventriloquism

Faye Wong offers the fantasy of an inner world that is autonomous and enigmatic, eternally outside of the grasp of the symbolic order. *ONE PERSON IN TWO ROLES* 一人分饰两角 (1995) suggests a private, true self within or behind the public image:

<sup>105</sup> Fung 2004:53.

<sup>106</sup> Fung 2002:276.

獨自說話 我是一個人  
但是對白 照樣分兩份  
兩份 是我和我 兩份  
就像裡面 有另一個人  
做著某段 兩人的戲份  
戲夢 在扣著我 人生

Talking on my own I am alone,  
but in dialogue I split in two.  
Two parts me and me two parts,  
as if inside there's another person  
playing some act for two people.  
Theater dream does me in for life.

別太認真 別太著緊  
亂說話怎麼當成真  
別太認真 別那樣天真  
亂說話怎麼會成真  
難道我是神

Don't be too serious don't be too impatient.  
Random prattle, how could it be taken for real?  
Don't be too serious don't be so innocent.  
Random prattle, how could it be taken for real?  
I could hardly be a god.

Karen Coats has described a similar construction in her analysis of Lewis Carroll's *Alice through the Looking Glass*.<sup>107</sup> Since the symbolic order is suspended in Wonderland, in that magical place notions such as gender and age lose the significance they had in the social and cultural systems of language and law. Simultaneously, Carroll's fantastic projection is fully within the symbolic order and entirely sustained by his desire. Carroll sublimates his lack onto Alice as an object of desire and pits his efforts against the enjoyment of the big Other, i.e. the symbolic order.

Alice wants to enter the symbolic order but Lewis Carroll's desire prevents her from growing up. Faye Wong, by contrast, combines aspects of both Alice and Carroll. Her sound-image-text suggests that Faye Wong carries an unspoiled "Ah Faye" inside her who doesn't need or want to grow up. Faye Wong would like to always be Ah Faye, but is forced by the outside world (the media) to act as a responsible grown-up on numerous occasions, buffering the spontaneous, child inside her from corruption.

"one can't help growing older."

"*One* can't, perhaps," said Humpty Dumpty, "but *two* can."<sup>108</sup>

The desire of the audience, and of fans in particular, sustains this projection, and blinds them to Wong's role as Lewis Carroll, as consciously planning and manipulating her media image, to great commercial success.

Although the whole fantastic construction is built around the desire fans feel towards Faye Wong, it is going too far to say that fans by definition fantasize about sleeping with their idols and that female fans of Wong (or of Mei Lanfang or Leslie Cheung) have lesbian tendencies, as the latter half of Chou Ch'ien-i's article suggests. Firstly because next to idolization, identification (being Faye Wong) is also crucial. Additionally, the idol is structurally unreachable. Similar to the Lady in the canso, the pop diva can be

<sup>107</sup> Coats 2004:86.

<sup>108</sup> Coats 2004:88, citing Lewis Carroll (162).

intensely desired while actualization is strictly out of the question, and will be refused.<sup>109</sup> In the end, the credibility of the construction of a public Faye Wong versus an eternally pure and young Ah Faye depends also on the willingness of fans to go along with the fantasy, to “not be too serious.” In Susie Au’s words, “It’s about exploring her fantasy, or my fantasy about her.”<sup>110</sup>

## Against the Politics of Romance

Faye Wong’s autonomy, androgyny and duality can be experienced as liberating. In a number of songs, Wong more directly challenges the centrality of *yang* and its stress on masculinity and rationality, albeit in a playful and non-confrontational way.

In the clip *HEADING FOR TUMI* (1999, d. Susie Au), Faye Wong eliminates black men with toy guns and a huge snowball, opposing the symbolic order they represent with a hedonistic and unspoiled *jouissance*. *THAT YOU LIKE ME MATTERS LESS THAN THAT I LIKE YOU* 你喜歡不如我喜歡 (2000) discredits causality in romantic relationships, celebrating love’s illogical and spontaneous nature:

愛你是我的習慣	It’s my habit to love you.
不管你未來怎麼辦	No matter what you do in the future,
不能償還 不用交換	no paying back, no need for exchange.
你喜歡不如我喜歡	That you like me matters less than that I like you.

那麼簡單 就把這情歌亂彈	As simple as that, randomly playing this love song,
你來聽 我來唱	you’ll listen and I’ll sing.

In this song, Wong sings of men as toys and as objects in galleries and museums (open to the public), nice but ephemeral to the autonomous Faye Wong. Wong is known for commenting: “men are flirts 花心, so why not look for a handsome one.”<sup>111</sup> *DEPRESSING* 悶 (1997) contains her lyrics that come closest to feminism:

誰說愛上一個不回家的人	Who said loving someone who doesn’t come home
唯一結局就是無止境的等	can only result in endless waiting?
是不是 不管愛上什麼人	Will you demand whoever you love
也要天長地久求一個安穩	to reassure you until the end of time?
噢噢難道真沒有別的劇本	O... O... Is there really no other script?
怪不得能動不動就說到永恆	No wonder that at the least little thing
	eternity is dragged in.

誰說愛人就該愛他的靈魂	Who said loving someone means loving his soul
否則聽起來讓人覺得不誠懇	or others will think you don’t really mean it?

<sup>109</sup> See in this respect also Oriole Cui’s fate in the Tang Dynasty marvelous tale.

<sup>110</sup> Conversation, Susie Au, July 2007.

<sup>111</sup> Huang 2005:164.

是不是 不管愛上什麼人  
也要天長地久求一個安穩  
噢 噢 我真想有那麼的單純  
不可能難道真沒有別的可能  
這怎麼成

Will you demand whoever you love  
to reassure you until the end of time?  
O... O... I'd really like to be that simple.  
Impossible, is there really no other option?  
How can this be?

我不要安穩 我不要犧牲  
別希望我會愛到滿身傷痕  
我不怕沉淪一切隨興能不能

I don't want reassuring I don't want sacrifice.  
Don't want to love you till I'm covered with scar.  
I'm not afraid of petering out,  
couldn't we just go with the flow?

Whereas WHEN WILL THE GENTLEMAN RETURN 君何日再来, sung by both Zhou Xuan and Teresa Teng, and LOVING SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T COME HOME 愛上一個不回家的人 (1990) by Sandy Lam, repeat the passive, waiting role of Chinese women, Faye Wong empowers Chinese women by suggesting that they have a choice. But she goes no further. She has not articulated a truly feminist agenda. Rather than joining the battle of the sexes, Wong opts for spontaneous insight into the futility of “attributes” that cloud pure love. In her discussion of the album *To Love* 將愛 (2003), she presents love as enigmatic, while referring to her Buddhism:

Faye Wong: “I already said everyone has a different understanding [of love]. If you feel that [TO LOVE] is gloomy, that reveals your view of things often contains a pessimistic standpoint. As for the comparison of love and war in this song, what I express is not emotional experience 感受 but emotional depth 感慨. Love originally isn't war, but my love will beget a battlefield. When outsiders observe my love, they will attribute lots of things to it, such as fame, [marketing] strategies, etc. But in fact love is just love, it's a very simple thing. I'm not saying love is war, but due to the outside environment as well as what gets attributed to it, it may seem like a battlefield.”

Host: “Many people will offer entirely different explanations after hearing your songs.”

Faye Wong: “So even if I explain it myself, others will still persist in their own opinions. In fact I wrote this line “Carry love through to the end” 將愛進行到底 because past experience made me feel that many people have a dark, very unhappy perception of certain things. Love is love. There are no strings attached. But many people don't see it that way. Those views don't get to me, they will rather get at themselves. In fact, if we could have less superficial opinions and more love in our hearts, I think the world would be much more beautiful. The kind of love I speak about, is not only romance, it also contains another love.”<sup>112</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Zeng 2003a.

## §7 Fox Fatale

When Marc Moskowitz argues that “women have become the cultural ideal for what the majority of Chinese hope to be,” he refers to the performances of *yin* in contemporary mainstream pop rather than the more *yang*-oriented Iron Girls 鐵姑娘 of PRC mass music, rock chicks or even alternative voices within mandapop.<sup>113</sup> Do these assertive femininities challenge conservative notions of passive, moonish gender?

Baranovitch describes the Iron Girls as part of a moment of gender erasure:

In the process of gaining their social equality, in the overwhelmingly militant and masculine period of the Cultural Revolution, model women were supposed to aspire to be like men both physically and mentally. This concept of womanhood revealed itself, among other ways, in the much-celebrated officially sponsored image of the Iron Girls ... which emerged right before the Cultural Revolution and depicted women doing traditionally male work, such as repairing electricity lines and drilling for oil.<sup>114</sup>

Nevertheless, interviewees in Yan Ting Yuen’s documentary *Yang Ban Xi: The 8 Model Works* (2005) describe how their sexual desire was first aroused by one of the most central works of the Cultural Revolution, the ballet *The Red Detachment of Women* 紅色娘子軍.<sup>115</sup> This shows that although the Model Operas explicitly aimed at symbolic identification with larger-than-life *yang*-heroes fighting grotesque villains, idolization also played an important role, with beautiful heroes and heroines personifying utopia.

The fact that women perform center stage is no guarantee of emancipation. With both Mei Lanfang and Zhou Xuan, men held power behind the scenes. Nevertheless, although in Model Opera actors could also be replaced with relative ease – heroes were beautified by lighting, camera angles and upbeat music – artistic control was firmly in the hands of a woman, namely Jiang Qing. A more thorough evaluation of the emancipatory thrust of the Iron Girls and the Model Operas than I provide here would also address Jiang’s uncomfortable position as Mao Zedong’s wife and as scapegoat for the Cultural Revolution.

Despite the star system’s stress on individuality, replaceability has been part and parcel of mandapop too – for instance in Li Jinhui’s Bright Moon troupe and, more recently (around 2005), the Twelve Girls Band, who play poppy, upbeat instrumental renditions of Chinese and European classics, as well as new compositions on traditional Chinese instruments. Wang Xiaojing, one-time manager of Cui Jian, is behind the success. He explains:

<sup>113</sup> Moskowitz 2010:87, cf 29.

<sup>114</sup> Baranovitch 2003:108-109.

<sup>115</sup> Yan 2005.

The Twelve Girls Band is immensely popular in China and abroad. [So] I told them, you have to see clearly what lies ahead and take a firm hold of your position. I think they truly understand and will cherish their jobs. This format of ours is quite convenient: every one [of the fourteen performers] is replaceable.<sup>116</sup>

This already suggests that the PRC's liberalization and free-market economy have not necessarily led to a comprehensive improvement in women's sociopolitical and cultural state and role, as compared to the Revolutionary Era. On the contrary, Baranovitch argues that the sound-image-text of the domesticated, gentle, sweet, restrained women that dominated the 1990s has offered very limited liberating possibilities for women, and is essentially male-dominated.<sup>117</sup> Moskowitz similarly concludes:

Although *wenrou*, *lamei* [spicy/hot girl] and *ke'ai* [cute, *kawaii*] (or some combination of the three) are the three most prevalent forms of femininity portrayed in the Gang-Tai pop industry, three Hong Kong-based performers in particular have added a new rebellious component to the mix: Karen Mok, Anita Mui and Faye Wong. ... Far from going for shock value or challenging established norms, in many ways mandapop lyrics are more conservative than the real world ... Mandapop songs are strongly gender coded by both lyrics and performances, yet because audiences are fully aware that men write many of the songs that women sing, the songs are also a testament to a faded line between women and men.<sup>118</sup>

I have already shown that Mei Lanfang, Zhou Xuan, Teresa Teng, Leslie Cheung, Anthony Wong and Faye Wong offer audiences opportunities for articulating progressive genders.<sup>119</sup> They do so, not through confrontation, but through the ambiguity that arises from the interplay of textual metaphors, gender bending, and the interaction between film roles and the star persona. Sammi Cheng and Anita Mui further show that ambiguity is the Chinese pop star's main strategy in addressing gender issues.

Just like her main rival Faye Wong, Sammi Cheng developed away from the passive femininity of her first hits. Cheng's *TEN COMMANDMENTS* 十誡 (1994) was banned from radio and television in Hong Kong because of 'pornophonic' background croons. To a groovy beat, *TODAY YOU ARE SO GOOD, MAN* 男仕今天你很好 (1995) ironically celebrates the greatness of men, because "without you, women would have nothing to fret about." Incidentally, the song also qualifies Moskowitz' claim that humor in pop music is restricted to the domain of male songs.<sup>120</sup> Cheng performed *BEWARE OF WOMEN* 小心女人 (1996) in a tuxedo at concerts in 1996 and 2000, with male dancers kowtowing to her. However, from 1997 Cheng's feminism became less confrontational, moving towards an-

<sup>116</sup> Zhang 2004:17.

<sup>117</sup> Paraphrasing Baranovitch 2003:113.

<sup>118</sup> Moskowitz 2010:85-6.

<sup>119</sup> On Anthony Wong, see De Kloet 2010:131-138.

<sup>120</sup> Moskowitz 2010:97-99. S.H.E. and Faye Wong have also used humor, albeit sporadically.

drogyny and traditional ideals of female beauty (slimness), which Anthony Fung explains through the restrictions of the pop industry.<sup>121</sup> For instance, in 2001 she published an album with romantic ballads titled *Wenrou* 溫柔 ‘gentle.’

Sammi Cheng was inspired by Anita Mui, whose *BAD GIRL* 壞女孩 (1986) was controversial in the 1980s. It was banned in the PRC for describing, to an arousing dance rhythm, how a seducer “makes an innocent girl want to become bad” (as Lawrence Witzleben puts it).<sup>122</sup> Cheng and Mui worked together to record the ballad *SINGLE WOMEN* 單身女人 (Mui 2002), in which they discuss their problems in romance and work, referring to their star personas, over dinner. As this ballad shows, to Mui, too, assertive femininity is one of many faces, some of which are conservative and passive. Again, this doesn’t mean that these artists haven’t contributed in this realm, but that celebrating them as straightforward symbols of female emancipation is too easy.

Moskowitz observes that, in contrast to the West, in Chinese pop the image of the vixen is almost non-existent.<sup>123</sup> Written around 1679 and still a source of inspiration for opera, cinema and TV drama, Pu Songling’s *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* 聊齋誌異 provides a locus classicus for the siren-like fox-spirit 狐狸精. However, aside from Zhou Xuan’s contemporary Bai Guang, few have cultivated this Lady and her excessive *yin* energies.<sup>124</sup>

Additionally, all recent examples of androgyny and gender transgression originate from Hong Kong. Taiwan seems most traditional, even if one considers the singer-songwriters discussed in the previous chapter. In the PRC, folk and rock music offer a stage for feminism. The new voices of women in the 1990s that Baranovitch describes use folk tunes to address personal and daily concerns.<sup>125</sup> De Kloet shows how female rock musicians from the 1990s to early 2000s

operate as signifiers of an assumed gender equality (denial), of cultural transgression (dramatisation), of political change (politicisation) and of a global modernity (cosmopolitisation). Whatever tactic they choose to negotiate the male bias of rock, female musicians operate in a cultural field considered quintessentially masculine, as well as carry [sic] the burden of representing a China in transition; they all too often serve as a proxy for something else, and are hence deprived of their individuality.<sup>126</sup>

Kang Mao’s traumatic growling with the punk rock outfit Subs (since 2003), Atom’s energetic role as drummer of Hedgehog (since 2005) and Helen Feng’s sultry alternative

<sup>121</sup> Fung 2009; 2004:44-61.

<sup>122</sup> Witzleben 1999:247.

<sup>123</sup> Moskowitz 2010:72.

<sup>124</sup> Ho 1993:39, 61. On how Communist heroines perform *yang*-roles, see Farquhar 2006:116. On gender erasure, cf. Zheng 1996:104.

<sup>125</sup> Baranovitch 2003:161-189.

<sup>126</sup> De Kloet 2010:119.

rock with Ziyi (since 2004) and Pet Conspiracy (since 2007) are just a few examples of the increasing presence of female musicians in the Beijing band scene.

## §8 Concluding Remarks

Music doesn't satisfy desire, but teaches you how to desire. My analysis of Chinese love songs in a psychoanalytic framework inspired by Žižek's reading of Lacan, supplemented with Chinese concepts such as *yin* and *yang*, *wen* and *wu*, validates this modification of Žižek's words. Pop stars invite audiences to identify with them, for instance to relive a painful break-up together, and to gain strength from that identification. This is true for Xiao He's *SIMPLE TRUTH* but also for Winnie Hsin's ballad *REALIZATION* 領悟 (1994). Moskowitz argues that

one can almost hear her lover's male voice as she paraphrases his reasons for leaving her. Thus, we have a man [Jonathan Lee] writing a song to be performed by a woman, criticizing a man by using his stereotypically male language.

This was the song that brought Winnie Hsin overnight success. Tellingly, it is widely thought that the song's popularity is in part due to the fact that it related to her real-life divorce. The fact that she "naturally" cries when she performs this piece also conveys this sense of authenticity to the audience. The statement that she only came to fully understand [and "realize"] herself in her unsuccessful struggle to communicate with a male romantic partner is also common in Chinese-language pop music.<sup>127</sup>

Simultaneously, stars offer themselves as objects of desire and idolization. Before Faye Wong, they did so by presenting themselves as beautiful, either by suggesting availability as girls and boys next door and as caring, understanding and *wenrou* friends, or by presenting an aura of glamor and success. Leslie Cheung performed both of these roles in *Across 1997*, first singing and dancing as a glamorous diva and later talking as a friend who shares an open secret with the audience. Since 1994, Faye Wong has introduced a coolness that places fans and their star in an intimate but unspeakable circle, projecting all unwanted news onto the media, who personify the worldly tainting of love and ideals.

These constructs shape gender roles and direct desire. They create fantasies that offer *jouissance* without exposing subjects to its traumatically real power, that enable people to listen to the voice of others without drowning in their alterity. The seemingly misplaced, subterranean sounds of the instrumental bridge of Faye Wong's *ROMANCE LIFE* 感情生活 (1998) are quickly pushed to the back again by the rumbling groove, by the buzz of life.

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<sup>127</sup> Moskowitz 2010:74.

# Chapter 4: Theatricality

## §1 Boundaries

In *Imagination and Power: The Ideological Analysis of Theatre* 想象與權力：戲劇意識形態研究 (2003), Zhou Ning is “concerned with the theatricality in the deep layers of the psychological structure of Chinese cultural character,” arguing that “the function of both [ritual and thought] lies in transcending the boundaries between reality 現實 and the fabricated 虛構, or confusing the two, through illusion.”<sup>1</sup> During the Boxer Uprising peasants believed they were immune to bullets, which shows that getting carried away can have dire consequences:

The Boxer Uprising (1900-1901) has many ties with theater; it didn’t distinguish the real 真 from the illusory 幻. [The Boxers] gathered and rebelled while singing arias, they practiced martial arts as if playacting, they were possessed by characters from plays and their spreading of fire, going into battle, tricks and moves were all just like those staged in plays.<sup>2</sup>

“Popular music creates alternative universes, echoey soundscapes allowing the listener to drift outside the often-stressful realities of everyday life,” argues Witzleben in his article on Anita Mui.<sup>3</sup> Throughout this study, the term *performance* has been instrumental in conceptualizing seemingly stable concepts, such as Chineseness, rock and femininity, as constantly renegotiated creations or articulations of normative or alternative universes. In this chapter, I focus on the theatricality of these performances.

Theatrical events take place in a realm that is different from that of outside, ordinary reality. On a stage, it can be a different year or place than it is in the auditorium. Theatricality is defined by frames: architectural frames, such as an elevated stage or a proscenium arch; visual frames, such as lighting, costume and decor; narrative frames, such as introductions, titles and credits; acoustic frames, such as the production of sound we call singing, and perhaps even musicality in general; temporal frames, such as the special day of the year on which a festival takes place, or a Saturday night. This framing that constitutes the theatrical space can be anything that creates a boundary one side of which is extraordinary.<sup>4</sup>

Not all theatrical events are equally explicit about their framing. Many TV dramas present enclosed worlds to which the viewer is a witness from behind the ‘fourth wall.’ Usually, elements that might disturb the illusion are carefully avoided so that the viewer can be ‘carried away.’ But then there is a commercial break, or a news flash, in which a newsreader looks directly into the camera and addresses the audience. Although both kinds of broadcast are theatrical – they are framed by the TV set, among other things – only the second explicitly refers

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<sup>1</sup> Zhou 2003:34.

<sup>2</sup> Zhou 2003:5.

<sup>3</sup> Witzleben 1999:245.

<sup>4</sup> Bal 2002:133, Culler 1988.

to its being-on-a-stage throughout. Theatrical events can be arranged according to a scale of theatrical explicitness, between the extremes of complete ordinary-reality-effacing make-believe at one end, and over-conscious, object-less reflectiveness at the other.

Moments of *Theatrum Mundi*, such as the Boxer Uprising, present the make-believe extreme of the scale of theatricality. Zhou Ning's descriptions of the Boxer Uprising and his discussion of historical plays bring the Cultural Revolution to mind, when the People worshiped Mao Zedong beyond any sense of reality. Furthermore, Zhou's ideas suggests that the issue of theatricality is relevant to China's current politics. Through detailed analysis of how on-stage reality relates to off-stage reality, this chapter also describes the basic premises that allow Chinese popular music to be politically engaged. Transgressive roles such as the hooligan and the clown cross the boundary between performer and audience, but may in their (rehearsed, framed) improper behavior also address social rights and wrongs. Music can articulate extraordinary spaces and rally crowds for utopia, dystopia or temporary escape. Before discussing transgressive roles and extraordinary spaces, I will investigate the scale of make-believe and reflectiveness by relating it to dichotomies such as idealism/realism, East/West and telling/showing.

## Idealism and Realism

By 'make-believe,' at the one end of the scale, I mean that the work presents on-stage reality as autonomous, and puts the fact that it is constructed and framed under erasure. Actors play being unawares of their being on stage, while audiences are expected, and expect, to forget the work's artificiality and be immersed, engrossed and carried away.<sup>5</sup> While this may take place in most if not all theatrical styles, at first glance it seems that mimetic, naturalist and realist styles are especially suitable to convince audiences that they are witnessing events by happenstance, i.e. that these events have not been created for them.<sup>6</sup>

However, on a different level, the 'willing suspension of disbelief' that is necessary for this scheme to work makes these styles less realistic than reflective theater, which doesn't hide its artificiality. Part of the realism of reality-shows is that the actors show awareness of the fact that they are being filmed – for instance, by commenting on what happened when they were drunk and forgot about the camera.

Seen in this light, it is make-believe that seems deceptive. Make-believe foregrounds interaction between characters in an on-stage narrative that can secondarily and implicitly be related to ordinary reality. This sounds a lot like idealism, and the enclosed world of make-believe theater seems perfect for performing the alternative universes of utopia. The related concepts *idealism* and *utopia* go a long way in accounting for make-believe's desirability (dreaming of a better world) and its dangers (dystopia, loss of contact with reality). However, the relation of make-believe and reflectiveness to idealism and realism is not unequivocal. Reflectiveness is indeed realistic and down-to-earth, in the sense that it deals openly with the actual theatrical situation. Nevertheless, at the same time precisely its explicit inspection of the connections between actor and audience, and between actor and role, suggests ideals for social interaction.

<sup>5</sup> Goffman 1974:6, 48-56.

<sup>6</sup> The mimetic project suggests a fundamental schism between word and reality. Paraphrasing Marston Anderson, quoted in Goldstein 2007:161.

In other words, the degree of explicitness does not say anything about the verisimilitude of either realism or idealism. Make-believe and reflectiveness have different ways of defining (or framing) ideals and reality.

## East and West

Noting the predominance of monologues, solo arias and asides in Peking Opera, Zou Yuanjiang argues that Peking Opera performances openly reflect on their being-on-a-stage.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Chinese theater has a tripartite system that distinguishes between actor, role and role type. According to Zou, this system accounts for the distancing effect, formulism and interruptability of Peking Opera.<sup>8</sup> Its interruptability is illustrated by the prevalent practice of staging *zhezixi* 折子戲, medleys of the most popular acts. This mode of presentation is incompatible with the Aristotelian dogma of unity of action, place and time, and supports Zou's overall argument that Chinese theatricality differs fundamentally from Western theatricality:

The stage attendant enters, pours a cup of tea and the lead actor drinks it on stage [when] his voice is bad or has gone hoarse. ... Attendants that change costumes [of actors] on stage or that move scenes, screens and props are a common sight in Chinese theater. Connoisseur Chinese audiences, or opera buffs, don't even notice these attendants. But when this traveled to the West, Westerners at first couldn't understand it. ... That there could be 'attendants' in Eastern theater, that it could address the audience, and even engage in exchange with the audience is [based on] the principle 'I acknowledge that I am acting.' This is unlike Western theater, which does not acknowledge that 'I am acting.' 'I' am truly happening in the enclosed space behind the 'fourth wall.' 'I' am living in this true environment. This is what Stanislavski argued: you should become Othello if you act Othello ... And Chinese opera is exactly the opposite: it acknowledges 'I am acting,' 'I am telling you I am acting ...,' 'I am make-believe' 假定. I tell you what will happen, I tell you the whole story [in advance], I am fundamentally not telling stories or acting out a character 演性格. Our opera performances always start with a prologue ... Why a prologue? To introduce the story's plot, whereas Western theater is always about suspense. ... In Chinese opera, the complete description of a person's character is presented on his face. The face-paint tells you everything. ... So, in Chinese opera everything is fake, there is no hiding and tucking away whatsoever ... In this sense, ... Western theater is clumsy, it is an imitation [of reality]. But our present opera actually copies Western theater. The stage sets of our present operas can't be moved by ten cars, they are even heavier than [those of] Western theater.<sup>9</sup>

Earl Ernst's study of Japanese kabuki and Joshua Goldstein's study of Peking Opera distinguish Eastern from Western theater in similar terms, which can be further related to the (defining) prominence of the notion of *rasa*, 'aesthetic rapture,' in Indian music and literature. Ernst writes

<sup>7</sup> Zou 2007:137.

<sup>8</sup> Zou 2007:44, 46-47, 85, 180.

<sup>9</sup> Zou 2007:88-89.

that in Eastern (presentational) theater “the actor does not lose his identity as an actor,” while in most Western (representational) theater “every effort is made to convince the audience that the stage is not a stage and that the actor is not an actor.”<sup>10</sup> Goldstein argues convincingly that in their activities to distinguish Peking Opera from Western theater, 1920s opera critics such as Qi Rushan over-emphasized Peking Opera’s non-realism. This drove a wedge between on- and off-stage reality: everything on stage should be symbolic, illusory and suggestive. Drinking tea on stage became unacceptable, even if the story permitted it.<sup>11</sup> The crux is that essentializing non-realism leads to sacrificing the equally defining permeability of the stage-space and to the establishment of something very much like a fourth wall. Whereas Goldstein describes this transition without passing a value judgment, Zou argues that Chinese theater should be restored to its full reflective splendor, including both non-realism and permeability.

These debates attest to the importance of the scale of explicitness to Chinese stage traditions. Nevertheless, one should not equate make-believe with Western theater, and reflectiveness with Asian or Chinese theater. Although Western and Eastern traditions have employed the explicitness of theatricality in different ways, they are too rich to be assigned single positions on the scale. Erika Fischer-Lichte and Jo Riley show that members of the European avant-garde of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century

wanted to propose an “other” theater, different in every way from what had gone before: a theater freed from the chains of literature, constituted as an autonomous art form; a theater which did not imitate a reality which actually existed, but which created its own reality; a theater which nullified the radical split between stage and spectator and which developed new forms of communication between them, so that the chasm between art (theater) and life, so typical and characteristic of bourgeois society, might be bridged.<sup>12</sup>

Western theater innovators who challenged the fourth wall, such as Bertolt Brecht, Vsevolod Meyerhold and later Jerzy Grotowsky, were inspired by Asian stage traditions, but also by Greek theater, folk traditions, popular (music) genres, *commedia dell’arte*, revue and vaudeville. Their theories have in turn influenced modern Chinese theater makers such as Gao Xingjian.<sup>13</sup> To avoid getting caught up in these cross-cultural and cross-media translations, I propose to explore theatrical explicitness per se, prior to the question of whether reflectiveness is more common in, or even defining of, Chinese painting, theater or opera, as compared to Western art forms.

## Showing and Telling

Make-believe theater is like *showing* a story, which entails identifying with its characters; and reflective theater is like *telling* a story, including the (critical) distance this implies.<sup>14</sup> However, if a story is told well, the audience will still identify with its heroes. Zou points out that although Peking Opera gives away the plot and is codified, estranging and so on, this doesn’t prevent

<sup>10</sup> Ernst 1974:18-19. Goldstein 2007:159-171. See also Fei 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Goldstein 2007:154, 171. On *yinchang* see Goldstein 2007:74-76, 162, 170 and Zou 2007:88.

<sup>12</sup> Fischer-Lichte 1997:115.

<sup>13</sup> Łabędzka 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Łabędzka 2008:74-79.

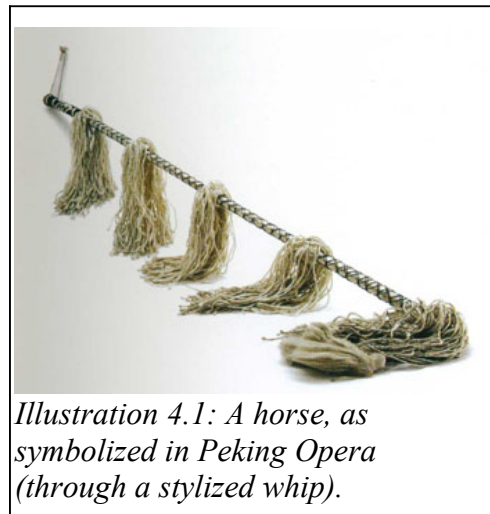
opera buffs from forgetting these frames and getting carried away. In such cases reflectiveness and make-believe do not alternate; such alternation happens, for instance, when the title and end credits frame a make-believe movie. Rather, when in Peking Opera a stylized whip symbolizes a horse, make-believe happens through reflectiveness.

The relation between human perception and interpretation of phenomena on the one hand, and mimetic resemblance on the other, is complex and contested. Perception involves extracting relevant information from unorganized sensory data by both immersive make-believe – adopting a perspective, becoming part of the data – and distancing reflection – assessing the data by comparing it to other information and scenarios. Theatricality capitalizes on these tendencies in human perception. This is also why in the following pages it is not my goal to pigeonhole performances as either make-believe or reflective, but to investigate how these different aspects relate and what happens when one occasionally gains dominant saliency in an artwork. Additionally, I am aware that audience members witness different performances, even if they would attend them at the exact same time and place. When Peking Opera buffs are engrossed by stylized whips, make-believe is dominant, but it also shows that it takes experience to block out reflective elements.<sup>15</sup>

I have chosen *make-believe* and *reflectiveness* rather than *showing* and *telling* primarily because I do not want to link the distinction to specific media and their particularities, such as verbal narrativity. *Make-believe* and *reflectiveness* are more abstract and less media-specific.

## §2 Transgressive Roles

When I arrive at the StarLive on June 8<sup>th</sup> 2007 I can hardly get in. Over a thousand people are squeezed into Beijing's largest rock venue to witness X.T.X.'s two-hour show, which is later published as *Xie Laughing at the Capital* 傾笑京城 (2008). Drummer Zhao Wei nearly breaks the toms in the drum fill of I COULD HAVE DIED YESTERDAY 昨天晚上我可能死了, which is reminiscent of the Nirvana song PAPER CUTS (1989). Dreadlocked bass player Guo Jian sways his hips, and rhythm guitar player Li Zhao, wearing cool sunglasses, shakes his shoulders. They walk across stage, but make sure not to get in the way of Xie Tianxiao's energetic rock star performance, which is the focus of the show. His white shirt with a woodblock picture of Great Helmsman Mao Zedong contrasts with the dark shirts of the band members, but in general their simple outfit of jeans and shirts suits the straightforwardness of the music. A large portion of the audience sings along with the uncomplicated, catchy melodies that critics have compared to those of the prison songs of the mid-1980s, much to Xie's chagrin.<sup>16</sup> X.T.X. waves his long hair, runs across stage, screams, gesticulates and pushes at mike stands and monitor speakers. During ASIMA 阿詩瑪, Li Zhao throws his sunglasses away as Xie Tianxiao gives the audience the finger. "Fuck you," read his lips as he moves away from the microphone. The mosh pit is seething. A



*Illustration 4.1: A horse, as symbolized in Peking Opera (through a stylized whip).*

<sup>15</sup> Goffman 1974:202-210. Page 207 introduces Peking Opera as an example.

<sup>16</sup> Conversation, Yan Jun, October 2008. Cf Yan 2008. Conversation, Xie Tianxiao, October 2008.

girl gets hurt as one of the few remaining bar stools tips over. Her boyfriend picks it up and rushes forward threateningly, but is calmed down by bystanders. Soon the moshing and pogoing is as intense as before. When the song is over, X.T.X. changes back to the typically humble Chinese stage persona and expresses happiness over seeing so many fans. His “I have really missed you” makes him suddenly sound like a pop singer, except for his out-of-town accent and shortage of breath. Male audience members shout “redhot 牛炭” and “I love you, Xie Tianxiao.”

Stage personnel help X.T.X. with his frequent changes of guitar (a rare phenomenon in China), straighten up microphone and cymbal stands, and clean up the mess. When agitated fans climb onto the five-foot-high stage, to dance and stage dive, the stage personnel guides them backstage and releases them back into the arena through a side entrance. Although the stage personnel are part of Xie’s record company 13<sup>th</sup> Month and thus familiar to him, X.T.X. is hostile to them.<sup>17</sup> They serve as props on

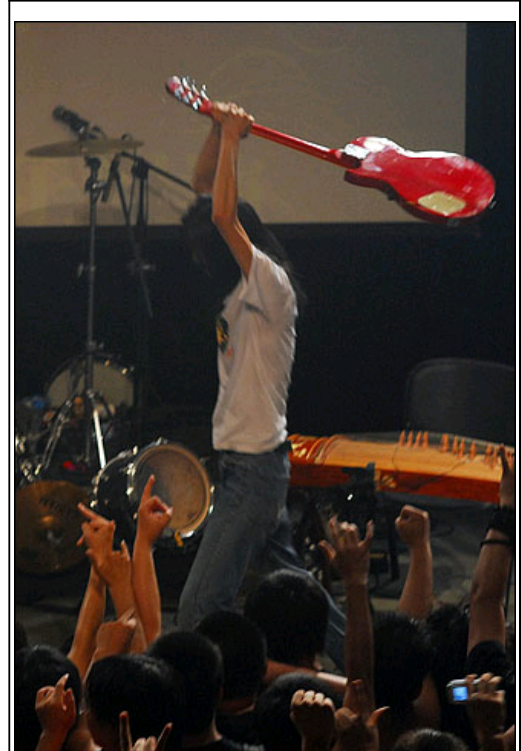
which to vent his anger. The show turns violent when X.T.X. starts smashing his guitar. The audience reacts hysterically. Guo Jian waves his bass around and eventually breaks it too. Zhao Wei pushes his drum kit over. Strings and pieces of wood fly every which way, but X.T.X. is far from satisfied. He circles the stage, screaming, ranting, pushing at the amps and at fans that have climbed the stage, until finally the stage personnel force the tormented rock hero backstage.

The first time Xie Tianxiao smashed his guitar was in 1998.

Back then smashing my guitar wasn’t staged 表演, I really felt there was too much sadness, and I could only use this way to let off steam. ... No one allowed me to, so when I did it, it was very satisfying. Nowadays they demand that I do it, and it’s become pointless.<sup>18</sup>

Gibson and organizers supply Xie with guitars, and Xie thinks “No point in not smashing them up,” and he gives sponsor, organizers and the audience what they want, resulting in guitar-smashing in about half of his shows since 2004.<sup>19</sup> He has repeatedly explained that he performs a stage persona that is divorced from his off-stage self:

In the past when I got on stage I was really immersed in that kind of mood, my whole person lived in anger and as soon as I got on stage I expressed it. But nowadays, my on-



*Illustration 4.2: X.T.X. at his 2007 show Xie Laughing at the Capital.*

<sup>17</sup> Conversation, Zhang Ran, October 2008. The name of the company refers to carnivalesque *extra*-ordinariness.

<sup>18</sup> Cheng 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Cheng 2006. Pingzi 2006.

stage me is more like a role, offering everyone a beautiful show. I've become someone else in real life, I'm married and have a two-year old daughter, and I'm happy with my life. In fact, I really enjoy performing the role of X.T.X. on stage. It's just like Peking Opera where people play [the role types of] painted-faces and ladies. The process of passion these stage arts provide is extremely enjoyable. Look at bands such as Marilyn Manson and the Rolling Stones, how do they preserve creative passion? Because they make a clear distinction between life and the stage. On- and off-stage are different to them. Now if you take for instance [Chinese punk rocker] He Yong, he's the same on- and off-stage, even if you just talk to him, he will smash a beer bottle. If you live like that, how can you maintain creative vitality?<sup>20</sup>

According to Zhang Ran, co-founder of 13<sup>th</sup> Month and organizer of the above show, Xie plays the role of Nirvana's front man Kurt Cobain. This is ironic in that Cobain seems to have been more like He Yong than like Marilyn Manson in the quote above.<sup>21</sup> However, in more general terms X.T.X. performs the role of the *liumang* 流氓, the 'hooligan.' 'Hooligan' is a broad notion that can encompass "rapist, whore, black-marketeer, unemployed youth, alienated intellectual, frustrated artist or poet."<sup>22</sup> The figure of the hooligan gained prominence with the parallel rise of opportunity and insecurity in the PRC of the 1980s, finding expression in the literature of Wang Shuo and the paintings of Fang Lijun and other *popi* 潑皮 'rascal' artists. Hooliganism is the rawness of a distorted guitar and the askew 歪 posture of the 108 outlaws 一百单八将 in the il-



Illustration 4.3: Black Whirlwind Li Kui, an outlaw from the *Water Margin*, drawn by Chen Laolian (1598-1652).

lustrations of the classical novel *Water Margin* 水滸傳 (ca. 1370, by Shi Naian).<sup>23</sup> In *The Festival of Liumang* 流氓的盛宴 (2006), Zhu Dake defines hooliganism in a broad sense by the loss of social status, nomadism and defeatism.<sup>24</sup> This definition relates hooliganism to subaltern and underground culture, musically embodied by rock, Northwest Wind and prison songs 囚歌.<sup>25</sup>

Xie's explicit distancing from his hooligan alter ego X.T.X. renders his performance reflective, at least to those who read or watch his interviews. Nevertheless, even these fans generally perceive his shows as authentic and credible or make-believable because Xie scripted them himself and his star persona is rooted in his biography. After Xie Tianxiao left his hometown in Shandong Province at the age of eighteen in 1991, he lived in the dilapidated artist villages on the outskirts of Beijing and engaged in the typical activities of hooligans: womanizing, picking fights, drug use and rock music.

<sup>20</sup> Qi 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Conversation, Zhang Ran, October 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Minford, quoted in Barmé 1999: 64.

<sup>23</sup> Zhu 2006: 11

<sup>24</sup> Zhu 2006:12, 59, 62.

<sup>25</sup> Baranovitch 2003:18-26 (Northwest Wind) and 26-30 (prison song).

## From Hooligan to Clown

Whereas Wang Shuo's cynical satire focuses on the hooligan's *joie de vivre*, Xie employs the role of the hooligan to perform despair and rage over the loss of home and identity. The protagonist of his lyrics typically gets lost in a forest or desert and doesn't know where to go to and who he is. The role of the clown can serve a similar purpose. While hooligans commit crimes, clowns question conventional boundaries through humor rather than violent transgression. Below, I will analyze how clowns transgress stage reality through contextual, intertextual and subtextual connections across the fourth wall. Contextual connections allude to the particular theater event, including plot and venue. Intertextual connections relate the show in question to other theater events and literary texts. A number of artworks discussed in the following pages refer to the classic story *Journey to the West* (1590s, by Wu Cheng'en), which recounts a Buddhist monk's arduous journey to India in search of the scriptures and enlightenment. Subtextual connections articulate links between the theater event and ordinary reality and conventions, for instance by offering a social critique or referencing personal biographies. Humor can make some frames explicit and leave others unnoticed.

## Peking Opera, Two-Taking-Turns and Sketches

*Chou* 丑, 'clown,' also means 'ugly.' Grotesque ugliness links clowning to exorcist ritual.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to the other three role types in Peking Opera, which typically perform kings (*sheng*), ladies (*dan*) and generals (*jing*), the clown usually plays characters of low status. Sometimes even literally so: some perform an entire play in a crouching position, or are trodden upon by the other actors. Much of the clowning in Peking Opera takes place through appearance (outfit and face-paint) and percussion-scored action (acrobatics, slapstick, mime). In comical dialogues the clown often uses colloquial language or dialect, which contrasts with Peking Opera's many stylized speech forms. Although this role type offers space to showcase virtuosity and improvisation, clowns eventually get punished and laughed at for their transgressions.<sup>27</sup>

With the increasing prestige of Peking Opera as a highbrow art form, the clown's opportunities for improvisation have diminished. However, the bawdy Northeastern Chinese stage tradition of Two-Taking-Turns has preserved the clown's transgressiveness, which revolves around comical dialogues between a clown and a lady (*dan*). These dialogues are often carried on to music and are sometimes accompanied by makeshift clothing (for the clown) and deliberately clumsy attempts at acrobatics on his part. The beautiful *dan* serves as a point of crystallization: she points out where the clown is improper, often by hitting and kicking him, which is itself improper behavior for a lady. The clown of Two-Taking-Turns, however, doesn't need to be ridiculed and trodden upon by others; rather, he consciously ridicules himself.

The clown also makes fun of canonical stories, such as *Journey to the West*, and of seriousness in general. His double-entendres and over-the-top exaggerations of instantly recognizable stories and songs play on the awareness of being-on-a-stage, and are often followed by explicit comment on the part of the female partner: that one cannot say this or that in public, or that this does not suit the role he is playing. This reflective stepping into and out of the operative

<sup>26</sup> Riley 1997:79. Zou 1996. Riley 1997:274, Thorpe 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Wichmann 1991:212, Gao 2006:41, Thorpe 2005:284. Cf. Zou 1996:6 on *huokou* 活口.

frame suits performance situations at temple fairs, as does the comical self-appraisal of clowns and their asking the audience what they want to hear next, and asking for applause. As to subtext, Two-Taking-Turns actors make explicit that their primary goal is to entertain. Their jokes are typically on thwarted sexual and material desire, though without going so far as to refer to specific sociopolitical events.

Starting as a Two-Taking-Turns actor in the late 1980s, Zhao Benshan has popularized a sanitized form of this regional theater for the state-owned PRC media. Between 1990 and 2010 he performed a sketch 小品 of around fifteen minutes in each but one of the CCTV Chinese New Year Galas. The humor in these plays is almost exclusively verbal, including tongue-twisting rhymes, and is supported by acting, stage props and a simple set. Many of the episodes of Zhao's TV series *Old-Root Liu* 劉老根 (2001, 2002) and *Generalissimo Ma* 馬大帥 (2003, 2004, 2005) feature musical performances, usually Two-Taking-Turns.

Both in these sketches and in his TV series, Zhao Benshan portrays (elderly) figures of low social status, a legacy of clown-type roles. In many of the sketches he has a female partner who at times mocks his backfiring wit. However, most of the humor is dry and tongue-in-cheek, with someone saying one thing and doing another (hypocrisy), or the pot calling the kettle black. While there is deliberate overacting in the sketches and the general mode is one of self-ridicule, Zhao and the other actors pretend to be unaware of the stage, and there are few moments of explicit crystallization of the humor. In other words, these shows are dominated by make-believe.

Not only the TV drama, but also the sketches, whose live audience is audibly and visibly present in the recordings, maintain the illusion of an enclosed world. The Two-Taking-Turns shows embedded in the TV series are reflective in the sense that the boundaries between their stage reality and its on-screen audience are made explicit and permeable. Main characters, such as Old-Root Liu, may comment on developments in the TV drama during their embedded on-stage appearances. However, they never explicitly address the audience at home behind the TV set. The permeability and reflectiveness of these Two-Taking-Turns shows is restricted to the narrative reality of the TV series, which itself remains dramatic make-believe.

Zhao Benshan's pieces contain a subtext of social critique. His sketches typically comment on things like the rapid changes in society that ordinary people have trouble keeping up with and the validity of peasant wisdom in the face of demanding government officials, or they parody the efforts of entrepreneurs to sell just about anything to unsuspecting passers-by. These engagements with mainstream social concerns contain numerous intertextual connections, from neologisms to pop lyrics. Sometimes Zhao will face the audience to stress these references, drive a point home, or orchestrate audience reaction. In these moments the theater event momentarily inclines towards reflectiveness.



Illustration 4.4: Liu Liu, Zhao Benshan and Song Dandan performing the sketch Torch Bearer 火炬手 at the 2008 CCTV Chinese New Year Gala.

## Second Hand Rose's Parody

Hi everybody, so you all came to hear Liang Long brag?

An informant argued that Second Hand Rose's appeal lies in their live shows, and especially in the ribald remarks in-between songs.<sup>28</sup> Lead singer Liang Long seems aware of this:

Liang Long: "You've come to engage in debauchery?"

Audience: "Yes!"

Liang Long: "You've come to hear Two-Taking-Turns?"

Audience: "Yes!"

Liang Long: "You've come to screw pretty girls in the name of rock?"

Audience: "Yes!"

Liang Long: "You've come to screw pretty boys in the name of rock?"

Audience: "Yes!"

Liang Long: "You're too fucking lewd."<sup>29</sup>



Illustration 4.5: Bass player Li Ziqiang at a Second Hand Rose show.

Rather than viewing these remarks as something extra-musical, I follow Derrida's argument for the inseparability of frame (parergon) and work (ergon).<sup>30</sup> Liang Long himself also sees his live shows as integrated performances in which he acts a role throughout, referring to the saying "a lead singer is half an MC 司儀." Just like that of Two-Taking-Turns, Second Hand Rose's humor is primarily directed at themselves. "You see a *dan* and hear a clown," is how Liang Long describes his stage persona.<sup>31</sup> The visual humor mainly lies in Liang Long's drag and the extravagant outfits of band members, who have

dressed up as characters from *Journey to the West*. The collage of sounds may create unexpected contrasts, for instance in the musical quotation of the classic Xinjiang folk song YOUTH DANCE (collected and rearranged by Wang Luobin in 1939) in the song YOUTH OH YOUTH 青春啊青春 (2009). Flutist Wu Zekun sings the dialogue of MARRIAGE REVELATION 征婚启示 through an instrument that gives his voice a Mickey Mouse sound, adding to the caricature-like nature of the lyrics.

Second Hand Rose's shows are mostly scripted. Their songs ideally sound the same everywhere, and in their site-independence and self-absorbedness they incline towards make-believe. Second Hand Rose restricts unscripted moments to transitions in-between songs and during intros, outros and bridges. Such unscripted moments, including improvisation and performer-

<sup>28</sup> Conversation, Xie Li, October 2007. A former employee of their record company, Big Nation, argued that Second Hand Rose is a live band. Fans collect Liang Long's remarks on the web.

<sup>29</sup> Liang Long in StarLive, Beijing, 10 August 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Derrida 1987, Bal 2002, Ruth 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Conversation, Liang Long, September 2008.

audience interaction, acknowledge the staginess of the performance and add to its reflectiveness. In the bridge of MARRIAGE REVELATION, Liang Long typically improvises on a theme:

Rumor has it that at the door of the Midi School [or the StarLive, or the New Get Lucky Bar] a group of artists collectively ... engaged in debauchery. Men and woman, young and old, Chinese, and foreign friends, film makers and painters. I heard one of them was a rock musician?!

Despite these moments of reflectiveness, Second Hand Rose's shows are predominantly make-believe overall. They also demonstrate that the stage is a separate world by distinguishing clearly between on-stage and off-stage personas. This is most easily discernible in the plain outfits Liang Long appears in for interviews and press conferences.

MARRIAGE REVELATION is also illustrative because the song offers a social critique, reminiscent of Zhao Benshan's sketches. During a live show in 2007, Liang Long introduced the song with a joke about whoring:

Once, when Second Hand Rose had performed a show, the night was long and lonely. The brothers said, 'Let's go for a walk.' So we went there. We went to the meeting place. We'd stood there forever, and the fucking police showed up [*audience chuckles*]. They took all of their money [*Liang points at the band members*], only Your Highness had any left [*cheers*]. The police said happily: 'I finally get the chance to meet you, master [*laughter*],' which saved the brothers two thousand RMB [*audience member: "too lewd, too lewd"*]. The next song is MARRIAGE REVELATION.

Liang Long ridicules the whole band, and the police, in an attempt to implicate the audience in his argument that denouncing debauchery is hypocritical. Therefore, I would argue that Second Hand Rose differs from glamrock or Japanese visual kei ヴィジュアル系 bands. Like many of these artists, their performance style criticizes the masculinity of guitar heroism, partly by creating otherworldly stage experiences, but they do not celebrate fashion and superficiality in ways similar to David Bowie, Gary Glitter or Glay.<sup>32</sup> Nor do the explicit artificiality of their shows exclude depth and authenticity. Liang Long explicitly sees his music as meaningful:

Liang: "Second Hand Rose has an air of staginess. For instance, the initial plan for the clip of SUBSISTENCE (MIGRANT WORKERS) (2005) was to show that you could have different roles. A band member would pose as migrant worker but would be dressed very fancy. Or he'd be someone playing in a nightclub, but dressed as a beggar."

Groenewegen: "Just like in THE COMMON INTEREST 公益歌曲 (2003)?"

Liang: "Yes, yes. [Quoting the song's lyrics:] "You are a monkey show-off 耍猴的," you could be all of those roles. It's about offering more perspectives. Because the approach is different, the same object appears different. That is an important function of music, to show the audience different aspects of reality."

<sup>32</sup> Auslander 2006.

Groenewegen: “Is that also the function of humor?”

Liang: “Humor has a dual purpose. It makes the audience understand that there is more than one perspective. You show them an angle they never suspected. Besides, it is entertaining. The audience hates being preached to. ... Making music is a lot like making documentaries. It’s just a bit more theatrical. If it resembles daily life too much, the audience feels no need to see your show. The audience doesn’t want to see band rehearsals. Only during the short time-span of a live show do they want to hear what you have to say.”<sup>33</sup>

In his account of the documentary role of art, Liang Long inclines towards typification 典型化, the condensation or intensification of reality, a concept that is central to the make-believe of Socialist Realism.<sup>34</sup> In Zhao Benshan’s sketches and Second Hand Rose’s lyrics, possible social positions are personified by readily understandable stereotypes, supporting arguments against the hypocritical denouncing of debauchery and in support of the carnivalesque adage that all roles can be reversed.

### Guo Degang’s Crosstalk

In spite of certain geographic and linguistic differences, the crosstalk 相聲 of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century must have had a close resemblance to Two-Taking-Turns. Practiced in reflective, bawdy variety shows in marketplaces in Peking and Tianjin, it absorbed influences from various stage traditions, including Peking Opera clown roles, and gradually came to center on verbal dialogues between two men: a joker (*dougen* 逗哏) and his sidekick (*penggen* 捧哏). In the newly established PRC of the 1950s, it managed to mend its vulgar ways and gain unprecedented support.<sup>35</sup> The connection between crosstalk and officialdom became stronger still during the 1980s as its practitioners focused on state television shows such as the CCTV Chinese New Year Gala, rather than on live performances.

Guo Degang, who began performing crosstalk in the mid-1990s, gained huge popularity almost overnight in 2006, mainly by re-vulgarizing the genre. He brought it back to the theater (and brought it onto the Internet) while addressing issues that were too sensitive for TV:

說相聲透於甚麼呀，  
透的是開心  
就是樂 是不是  
有意思，這是第一步  
逾笑逾樂，有把樂放在前邊兒  
我們也跟相聲界，  
有個同人探討我  
人們指著我，  
你這個相聲太沒有品位  
只顧的搞笑

Guo Degang: I’ll tell you what crosstalk is about:  
amusement.

Yu Qian: It’s [about] fun, isn’t it?

Guo: Arousing interest, that’s the first step.

Fun-tertainment; fun is foremost.

In the crosstalk community,  
a colleague scrutinized me.

This person pointed at me, [*waves his finger*]

“Your crosstalk is tasteless,  
it’s merely for laughs.”

<sup>33</sup> Conversation, Liang Long, September 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Zou Yuanjiang credits Socrates for this concept, but links it to the PRC of the 1950-1970s too (Zou 2007:85).

<sup>35</sup> The literary author Lao She and crosstalk performer Hou Baolin are credited for this achievement.

我說呢，先搞笑吧，

不搞笑就太搞笑了  
對，先樂

I said: "It is primarily for laughs.

*[his voice wavers, as if he could break into laughter any moment now]*

If there's nothing to laugh at, now that's hilarious."

Yu: Yes, fun first.

*[The audience laughs. Guo steps back to the table to pick up a towel and wipe his pudgy, bald head. His sidekick Yu Qian has been standing behind the microphone-stand in the middle of the table, which is the only stage prop. Both are dressed in rather plain, traditional, long-sleeved Chinese costumes; this time they are silver, while on other occasions they may be maroon, grey or black. The backdrop is a huge fan, upon which the name of the troupe headed by Guo Degang and the program are announced.]*

我跟中國相聲界有一個協議  
我負責幽默  
他們負責品位

逾笑逾樂，先得樂

您通過我們的節目，  
您悟道了甚麼東西是您的事兒

並非是我強加的

我們上台是讓您高興，  
不是給您上課  
說相聲都講講課，  
那還要學校干嘛呀，是不是？

Guo: I have an agreement with the Chinese crosstalk community. I am responsible for humor, they are responsible for good taste.

*[Guo chuckles, Yu laughs, the audience applauds and shouts. Guo waits for them to finish.]*

Fun-tertainment, fun comes first.

*[Hammers the words down with a pointing hand]*

Whatever insights you may gain through our program are your own.

*[Inclusive gestures]*

I absolutely didn't force them upon you.

*[Stressing every syllable, pointing at 'you,' the audience]*

We come on stage to make you happy, not to teach you.

If it's crosstalk's task to teach, what do we have schools for? *[Nods]* Right?

*[Yu laughs, the audience laughs along]*

The show overflows with reflectiveness. Guo addresses his audience to persuade them and, true to the art of rhetoric, not only the wording, but also the visual and acoustic framing add to his argument. Although the sketch explicitly opposes the use of crosstalk to disseminate knowledge, I submit that at least one important subtext is Guo Degang's (commercially successful) effort to pit himself against the official establishment as the true bearer of the People's stage traditions.

The lively nature of Guo Degang's shows resides not so much in unscripted improvisation as in the adaptation to actuality of *duanzi* 段子, 'scripts.' This is also consistent with Guo Degang's narrations of the sacrifices he has made for crosstalk, his accounts of the lineages of famous teachers and his introductions of various regional stage traditions, during which he sings excerpts in various dialects.



Illustration 4.6: Guo Degang.

In general, crosstalk pieces have clear subtexts. These frame their transgressive remarks and render them more or less acceptable. In my written account above, I left out some affirmations and intersections of the sidekick, but nevertheless his importance in informing the audience when to laugh is clear. Whereas in Peking Opera the clown is the object of laughter, in crosstalk the joker is the source of laughter, which he often directs at the sidekick. In one piece, Guo Degang first tells his sidekick to get off stage because he is incompetent. When he eventually reveals this to be untrue, stating that “We go way back,” Guo immediately continues with a new series of grotesque humiliations, presenting himself as the sidekick’s father. An elaboration of this is *zagua* 砸挂, the slandering of other crosstalk performers or well-known public figures. In 2006 Guo Degang mocked a

one-time fellow crosstalk student who had become a newsreader, saying that “his wife had slept with another man and was contemplating self-immolation.” The newsreader sued Guo Degang.

Guo’s stance against the official mainstream has struck a chord with the Beijing band scene. The Downtown Johns (since 2008) are explicitly inspired by Guo Degang. The male band members wear long gowns similar to those of crosstalk artists, and the band has covered the opening tune of Guo Degang’s TV series *In Pursuit of Happiness* 追着幸福跑 (2007). The Downtown Johns’ decidedly reflective shows, in rock bars and at festivals, usually consist of only a few sinified rock songs and a lot of crosstalk, in which the lead singer humiliates the other band members, with subtexts that ridicule the entertainment industry. When the lead singer claims to be a cultured person 文化人, the guitar player remarks that it doesn’t show, and then audience members usually shout “He really doesn’t look it!” After which the lead singer explains his sophisticated gastronomic customs, which turn out to be the most common of drinking games.



Illustration 4.7: Downtown Johns at the Modern Sky Festival 2009.

### Stephen Chow’s Silliness

Although audience interaction is limited in the pre-recorded world of cinema, there are many examples of reflectiveness on the screen, of which Stephen Chow’s films are arguably the most influential in Chinese-speaking regions. Chow’s humor is known as *mo lei tau* 無厘頭, ‘silliness’ in Cantonese, and has roots in the comedies of the Hui brothers of the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>36</sup> Although his films are typically Hong Kongese and contain many Cantonese language jokes, Chow has gained popularity across the sinophone world, especially with his *A Chinese*

<sup>36</sup> One of the brothers, Sam Hui, became Hong Kong’s first pop star, see Chapter 1 and §3 below.

*Odyssey* series, which consists of the two films *Pandora's Box* 月光寶盒 (d. Jeffrey Lau, 1994) and *Cinderella* 仙履奇緣 (idem).

Also known as “Journey to the West in Brag” 大話西游, *A Chinese Odyssey* is often understood as a postmodern parody or pastiche of the literary classic *Journey to the West*. The narrative story revolves around gradual realization by Joker of his identity as the Monkey King, and his acceptance of his destiny. Thus, in structure, *A Chinese Odyssey* resembles stereotypical Chinese hero-making stories, as popularized through Jin Yong’s novels and their adaptations. Typically a second, romantic plot intersects with the plot of heroic duty. As is the case in most of Stephen Chow’s films, *A Chinese Odyssey* recounts the hilarious ways in which an incompetent character saves the day.

Nevertheless, Stephen Chow’s silly humor often threatens to undermine narrative depth. He challenges cinema’s make-believe through meta-language, anachronisms, time-travel, campy shot-reverse shots, running gags, a deliberately clichéd soundtrack and, finally, a carnival of transformations. The spiritual possession of Joker’s right-hand man (I:0’ 40), love-inducing spells, schizophrenia (II:0’ 14) and the body swap of four characters (II: 0’ 46) all cast doubt upon the authenticity of the characters: is any character really him- or herself? This not only works within narrative reality, but also projects itself outside the screen, as a kind of *mise en abîme*, into questioning the make-believability of the roles. One can only answer the question “Is any character really him- or herself?” with: “Of course not: it’s a film! It’s Stephen Chou acting Monkey King reincarnated as Joker.”

A number of scenes contain more explicit framing through plays-within-plays, such as sabotaged invisibility spells (I:0’ 40), the over-enthusiastic re-enactment of ‘future’ events by visitors from the future (II:0’ 57) and a scene in which Joker freezes time to discuss his situation

with the audience (II:0’ 36). When it seems in this last scene that the hero will need to show his true colors, Joker manages to fulfill his desire while making no promises by cleverly quoting the script of Wong Kar-wai’s *Chungking Express* (1994). In other words, however silly, the comical twists perform a story of hero genesis that celebrates insubordination, manipulation and non-committalness. Zhu Dake argues that Stephen Chow’s characters and their ‘naughtiness’ 整蛊 are models for a generation that came of age in the late 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>37</sup> Yan Jun, in turn, argues that since the 1990s Chinese intellectuals and artists have increasingly viewed themselves as both critical outsiders to and successful participants in the mainstream, and that Stephen Chow’s heroes’ typical attitude of ridicule-yet-win reinforces this self-perception, which Yan finds dangerous.<sup>38</sup>



Illustration 4.8: Joker (Stephen Chow) in *A Chinese Odyssey II* (1994), confessing his love at knife-point. His “I will love you ten thousand years” parodies *Chungking Express* (1994).

<sup>37</sup> Zhu 2006:342-345, 374-377.

<sup>38</sup> Conversation, Yan Jun, September 2008.

## New Pants' Parody

From their 1997 debut album, New Pants revealed a playfulness and silliness that contrasted with the ballads of the popular mainstream and the seriousness that dominated the Chinese rock scene. When New Pants were hailed as members of the New Sound of Beijing 北京新聲 in the late 1990s, their adoration of the punk band Ramones was thinly veiled.<sup>39</sup> Over the years New Pants increasingly combined the upbeat and opportunistic style they adopted from the 1970s USA punk scene with synthesizer-generated sounds, and with references to Hong Kong popular culture. De Kloet's classification of New Pants as pop punk obscures their affinity with the "hard-core punk" bands of the late 1990s Boredom Contingent (congregating at the Scream Bar), and newer generations of punk and New Wave bands that emerged at the live venue D-22 around 2005.<sup>40</sup>

In early songs such as HEY! YOU 嘿! 你 New Pants address the audience directly, whereas in later works reflectiveness lies in their blatant artificiality. For instance, in LOVE BRINGS ME HOME 愛帶我回家 the band members dance in front of a bluescreen, most widely known as a technique to project maps behind televised weather forecasters. The bluescreen of LOVE BRINGS ME HOME locates the band amidst Hong Kong magazines, RMB banknotes and Beijing street views, but at the end of the clip the screen is lowered to reveal a living room.

The New Pants are exceptional in the Beijing band scene in the amount of attention they pay to images. They appear on the covers of their first three albums as comic book figures (*New Pants* 新褲子, 1998), clay figures (*Disco Girl*, 2000) and robots (*We Are Automatic* 我們是自動的, 2002). Many of the video clips of this period consist completely of these animated alter egos.<sup>41</sup> For instance, in SHE IS AUTOMATIC 她是自動的, robots representing the band members save a girl in a parody of *Star Wars*. New Pants' fourth album *Dragon Tiger Panacea* 龍虎人丹 (2006) reenacts the hipster culture of late 1980s Beijing, when youths wore black sunglasses and training suits and carried ghetto blasters with disco music. In the video clip of the title track, New Pants parody stereotypical 1970s and 1980s Hong Kong kung fu movies, and during live renditions of EVERYBODY 愛瑞巴迪 keyboard player Pang Kuan imitates disco moves from *Saturday Night Fever* (1977, d. John Badham). The album inspired a retro hype in Beijing fashion. Their next album *Wild Men Need Love Too* 野人也要愛 (2008) is an attempt to relive the Beijing of the early 1990s as a period in which macho, long-haired, leather-clad hardrockers enchanted pretty girls.



Illustration 4.9: New Pants on a promotional picture for their 2006 album *Dragon Tiger Panacea*.

<sup>39</sup> Yan 1999a; De Kloet 2001:95.

<sup>40</sup> Hedgehog wore New Pants shirts during shows in 2007.

<sup>41</sup> For these older clips, see the DVDs *Sky Image: 1997-2002* 天空影像(2007) and *Sky Image2: 2002-2006* 天空影像2 (2007).

New Pants' parodies extend into music. Already in their earlier work the adaptation of three-chord four-line punk, and certainly their use of 1980s synthesizer sounds and beats, seems to be reflective playacting. Furthermore, their vocal delivery is sometimes dehumanized through sound effects reminiscent of Kraftwerk. At other times it is exaggerated, rising and falling between falsetto and the lower registers, creating an impression of hysteria. In isolation, these sounds are not necessarily inauthentic, but given their sharp contrast with the underground scene in which they were active, and especially in the context of their artwork and MTVs, New Pants are performing reflective parody.

Having said that, part of the fun is the possibility that the game is real, that the 1980s sunglasses or 1990s wigs are make-believable rather than reflective. The band explicitly states that they truly adore the spirit of the 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>42</sup> Retro works so well because it combines familiarity with estrangement. Many fans remember participating in the hypes of those periods, while the slightest exaggeration highlights the fact that these things are out of touch with current reality, triggering laughter and reflection. The retro style and the parody practised by New Pants remain reflective, without incapacitating make-believe altogether.

Seriousness and political engagement are rare, but not altogether absent. At the Modern Sky Festival 2008, Pang Kuan dedicated the song FAMOUS DIRECTOR 著名導演 to lead vocalist Millionaire Peng, who shot most of New Pants' clips and short films:

我要當一個著名導演	I want to be a famous director
我要女演員陪我睡覺	I want to sleep with actresses
我要當一個著名導演	I want to be a famous director
我要你陪我去嘎納	I want you go to Cannes with me

胡子 禿子 肚子 辮子	Beard Bold Belly Braid
Alright Action Cut	Alright Action Cut

Although the song refers to recent scandals, it is difficult to establish a univocal subtext, i.e. to decide whether New Pants worship these unethical directors or ridicule them. This opportunistic attitude of 'having it both ways' is similar to most of Stephen Chow's roles.<sup>43</sup>



*Illustration 4.10: Millionaire Peng and Pang Kuan on a promotional poster for the 2009 New Pants album Go East.*

<sup>42</sup> Conversation, Millionaire Peng, October 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Despite the fact that New Pants comes from Beijing, Millionaire Peng acknowledged that their humor resembles Hong Kong comedies rather than North Chinese genres such as Peking Opera, crosstalk and Two-Taking-Turns, adding that this is a conscious business strategy, adopted in order to appeal to broader audiences (conversation, Millionaire Peng, October 2008).

## Top Floor Circus' Absurd Humor

It is said that Top Floor Circus picked their name when they were dining on a rooftop in 2001. They are said to have appreciated its intertextual connection to Kafka's *Auf der Gallery* (1917), which had been translated into Chinese as *On the Top Floor of the Circus* 馬戲團頂層樓座上.<sup>44</sup> Regardless of the accuracy of this anecdote, it captures Top Floor Circus' combination of folksy lightheartedness and absurdity. At first, Top Floor Circus abandoned the limits implied by fixed divisions of labor and frequently switched instruments. They made dissonant and unconventional sounds, or framed conventional sounds in unexpected circumstances. For instance, they ended the second day of the Midi Music Festival 2001 in completely escalated noise, with the rock critic Sun Mengjin repeatedly slapping his forehead with the microphone while his eyes seemed to pop out.<sup>45</sup> Their first EP (2002) contained questioning 'huh' sounds, seemingly demanding explanation, or simply attention. The empty phrases of the phone conversation in the song *WWW.FUCKINGMACHINES.COM*, from *The Preferences of the Most Vulgar Little Urbanite* 最低級的小市民趣味 (2004), elaborate this: they are framed by subtextual connections to the SARS epidemic and its absurd effects on human relations. The album was banned because a romantic ballad bearing the name of band leader Lu Chen consists entirely of Shanghainese foul language, ending in a men's choir singing the word 'fucking' to background croons. Another song explores all the grammatical and ungrammatical uses of the word 方便面 'instant noodles,' inserting it into catchphrases of popular hits.<sup>46</sup>

Humor has played an increasingly important role in Top Floor Circus' music. In comparison to the examples discussed above, Top Floor Circus are extremely cynical. They are less eager to please than most bands, and less eager to establish collectivity through laughter at an outsider. Most of the songs on their 2006 album *Lingling-Rd 93 Revisited, Timmy!* 蒂米重访零陵路93号 are in Shanghainese and parody punk's aggression as dumb and gutless (with reference to the legendary American punk rocker GG Allin). The song *WE DON'T WANT YOU UNDERSTAND US* hardly needs explanation, and both *JIAO JIAO 娇娇* and *MALE GORILLA AND FEMALE REPORTER 公猩猩與母記者* discredit any value in philosophizing beyond the seduction of girls. Top Floor Circus find joy in ridiculing some of the core values of the community, in this case the high esteem which the rock scene accords to revolutionary action and seriousness. It is therefore not surprising that some rock musicians and audiences discredit them as incapable musicians and their music as inconsequential 'malicious spoofing' (恶搞 *egao*, from the Japanese *kuso*).

Simultaneous with their increasing attention to humor, Top Floor Circus have become more conscious of the stage and the audience. Their earlier efforts to break with musical and moral conventions extended into subverting the frames of theatricality by flirting with conceptual and performance art.<sup>47</sup> On April Fools Day 2007, Top Floor Circus organized a "Top-Circus Al-

<sup>44</sup> Guo 2007a:224.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Yan 2002:303.

<sup>46</sup> Top Floor Circus resembles the extreme punk band Punk God. However, Punk God's disrespect is more overtly political, resulting in their performance at a pro-Taiwan independence festival and their subsequent exile. The Top Floor Circus change Punk God's signature song *YOU DON'T LET ME ROCK* 你不讓我搖滾 into "You don't let me take it easy" 你不讓我方便.

<sup>47</sup> Recent albums contain extended covers of the Beatles and the Chinese pop rocker Zheng Jun (the latter in cooperation with Glorious Pharmacy). These performances resemble conceptual art because they address the framing and staging of art works, and are not interested in technical perfection. Lu Chen's solo album *Spontaneous Artifice* 做作

ways OK” Super Chamber Pot Contest “頂馬永遠 OK”超級馬桶大獎賽. In this event, a parody of the *Idols* contests that dominated mainstream media,<sup>48</sup> bands could sign up to play covers of Top Floor Circus songs to a jury of renowned rock critics.

Groenewegen: “How would you describe your humor?”

Lu: “It’s the dumbest humor around. Everyone should be able to understand it.”

Groenewegen: “Silliness?”

Lu: “It’s not the same as silliness, I still want to say something with it, and try to make a point. I use humor because then people will not be irritated. If you are funny, people like you.”

Groenewegen: “But you have recorded abusive songs, and I don’t believe everyone likes that.”

Lu: “We should try harder.”

Groenewegen: “Isn’t it a problem that if you are very funny and entertaining, people don’t understand what you are trying to say anymore?”

Lu: “Well, that is precisely what I am trying to get across, that all these things they think matter so much are actually not important. People should let go. Even music is not important. Tonight we will invite real circus artists. I have wanted to do this for a long time. So I discussed it with the [direction of the 2008 Modern Sky] festival and they liked the idea. The audience understands very well that we are no real circus band, so it doesn’t matter if it is not technically perfect. If the idea gets across, that’s good enough.”<sup>49</sup>

Lu Chen spent a considerable amount of money to hire professional circus acts, including belly dancers, a clown and a magician. When the female magician left, Lu Chen, who was acting as host and ringmaster, commented: “In fact these acts rely on technique, just like the rock bands you have seen in this couple of days.” Then Top Floor Circus performed two songs, PUNKS ARE ALL SISSIES 朋克都是娘娘腔 and SHANGHAI WELCOMES YOU 上海歡迎你. SHANGHAI WELCOMES YOU is a parody of BEIJING WELCOMES YOU 北京歡迎你, an official song to promote the Beijing 2008 Olympics.<sup>50</sup> A few days earlier in the Beijing venue StarLive, Lu Chen had introduced the song with a short play. Dressed as the Haibao 海寶, the official mascot of the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, he beat five Beijing girls who represent-



*Illustration 4.11: Lu Chen as ringmaster at a 2008 show of Top Floor Circus in StarLive, Beijing.*

得很自然 (2001) is devised to make the listener aware of his or her musical prejudices.

<sup>48</sup> The title plays on the correspondence between the first character in the words for ‘circus’ 馬戲團 and ‘chamber pot’ 馬桶. The top three acts were awarded different kinds of toilets.

<sup>49</sup> Conversation, Lu Chen, October 2008.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. De Kloet 2010:128.

ed the five Fuwa 福娃, the mascots of the Beijing Olympics, stating that “The Olympics are over, it’s my time now.” The chorus of the song runs:

上海歡迎你	Shanghai welcomes you!
歡迎來買東西	Welcomes you to come shopping,
千萬不要忘記帶上人民幣	and don’t you forget your RMB.
上海歡迎你	Shanghai welcomes you!
奧運會有甚麼了不起	What’s so special about the Olympics?
讓我們在世博會相聚	Let’s meet again at the World Expo

Lu Chen entered through the audience, shook hands with people in the first rows in mock stardom, and invited audience members (in fact members of the rock scene) on stage to participate in a bogus contest. Especially in these live shows, Top Floor Circus go beyond reflectiveness and seek to frustrate the suspension of disbelief. But although Top Floor Circus ridicule the conventions of pop and rock audiences, they stop short of abolishing audience-performer barriers completely.

### Xiao He’s Playacting

Xiao He: “I want to find a teacher in Beijing who will teach me vocal techniques.”

Groenewegen: “Not an instrument?”

Xiao He: “No, it takes a minimum of two years to learn an instrument and then you would still end up playing guitar, trying to adapt what you learned for the guitar. You can learn the same by listening. But I do want to learn vocal techniques, in the style of one of the opera traditions. So that later I can totally be a clown 小丑 on stage, engaging the audience directly.”

Groenewegen: “I like clowns, they can cross the fourth wall.”

Xiao He: “Yes, clowns can transcend time-space.”<sup>51</sup>

The humor of Xiao He and his band Glorious Pharmacy resembles that of Top Floor Circus, especially in their pursuit of freedom and spontaneity, and the bands have collaborated on a number of occasions. However, whereas Top Floor Circus generally focus on concepts and are uninterested in musical details, Xiao He primarily focuses on sounds and rarely positions himself unequivocally vis-à-vis established traditions, through parody or other means. Take, for instance, SWING OH SWING 甩呀甩, which Xiao He performed many times in his solo shows. He recorded an elaborate version of the song with Glorious Pharmacy in 2008:

0' 00	Drum roll. Xiao He speaks in a low voice, almost whispering. Background sounds of playing children.	In my early days I could pee incredibly far, could pee from one block to the next. In my early days I could pee incredibly far, could pee all the way from the men’s room to the ladies’ room.
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<sup>51</sup> Conversation, Xiao He, august 2009.

	Repetition, delivered as if hushing you to sleep.	Incredibly far... Draw a long, long dragon on the way home, draw a long, long dragon on the night street.
1' 45	Instrumental chorus of guitar, bass and drums led by accordion. The melody is taken from <i>BLUE</i> by the French space disco band Space ( <i>Just Blue</i> , 1978), but on the accordion is more reminiscent of the Italian folksong <i>BELLA CIAO</i> (aka <i>FAREWELL FRIEND</i> 啊再見朋友). The drums accentuate the off-beat of a slow four-fourth. A marimba echoes the accordion theme. The warm voice of Zhao Zhongxiang is sampled from the TV program <i>Animal World</i> 動物世界 (the booklet credits Zhao for inspiring this song). He narrates the difficulties of animals as they are born into this cruel world. Each time the melody is completed, the music pauses briefly. After two full renditions, accordion and marimba play a short question-and-answer sequence.	
2' 30	The music becomes a fast shuffle, but still breaks into a short pause after every phrase of the lyrics. After the first sentence the marimba plays that “different sound,” then Xiao He grumbles the second phrase like an old man.	One day I heard a different sound: it came from my father.  One day I heard a different sound: it came from my father.
3' 00	Chorus. Zhao narrates: “When the lion cubs enter this world they don’t know a thing ... Depend entirely on their mother ... Are they enemies or friends?”	
3' 40	The music finally starts flowing smoothly. A men’s choir repeats the last words of every phrase in close harmony. Solemnity.	So I ran to this day insanely. So I came to this place bravely. So I approach you with my beauty. So I have struggled with a smile, until now.
4' 10	Double time, creating excitement. There is a break after every ‘today’ which is filled with an ascending scale. With the last sentence, the scale extends into the next measure, and a number of Xiao He’s voices repeat ‘grand, grand, grand’ in a	Today... I can finally pee like my father, so great. Today... I can finally pee like my father, so handsome. Today... I can finally pee like my father, so insane.



Reflectiveness is evident in most of Glorious Pharmacy's songs, on records through comments, in stage directions, in role-play, and during live shows in their use of props and collaboration with actors, dancers, theater makers and film directors. From BEIJING MONTHLY 北京月訊 (2005):

你的笑容	your smile
將破碎在下一個樂章	will be smashed in the [song's] next movement.

*[A loud cymbal bang and a quick three-quarter beat with a sample of what appears to be a laughing monkey.]*

斷裂的手臂下墜	your fractured arm will hang down.
將於地板排擊出	it will tap out on the floor
這部偉大作品最痛苦的一次	the most miserable rendition of this masterpiece.
收場	clear the stage,
這都是我的罪惡	all of this is my wrongdoing,
那比屎要醜陋一萬倍的罪惡	a wrongdoing ten thousand times uglier than shit,
即使它經常披著	even if it often wraps
那件初陽的銀紗	that silver lining of a looming sun.
原諒我	forgive me!
當時我實在是找不到	at the time I honestly couldn't come up
別的東西了	with anything else,
找不到了	couldn't think of anything.

In terms of paraphrasable content, BEIJING MONTHLY addresses the artificiality of music, which it positions as a prerequisite for innovation. When someone shouts "Play it again!" 再来 at the end of the song, without any audible applause, it seems we are in a rehearsal space, and the band is going to work through the song once again. This makes the labor put into the music explicit.

DISTRACTION 走神 (2008) is Glorious Pharmacy's only parody, and it is directed towards an older generation of Chinese rock bands. Xiao He shouts stage directions in-between the lyrics, such as 'next chord' or simply "G," to stress that this music is boring to the extent that the musicians themselves get distracted and need reminders. In HORSE DRAGON 馬龍 Xiao He portrays both the role of the parents who tell their children a scary bedtime story and, with a different voice, the role of the fantastic creature in that story. In the 2005 version of this song, as opposed to the 2002 recording, Xiao He doesn't sing the lyrics of the children Mimi, Niuniu, Lumpy and Blacky. Their tumbling voices are now portrayed by the frivolous interplay of saxophone and acoustic guitar.

As for live events, ever since their formation in 1996 Glorious Pharmacy have been involved in performance art, which in the early period allegedly also involved defecation.<sup>52</sup> At the Midi Modern Music Festival 2003, Glorious Pharmacy invited a number of actors. The physically impaired dancer Xifu smoked and drank beer with his feet. During another song, Xiao He's

<sup>52</sup> Conversation, Xiao He, 2007.



Illustration 4.12: Actors performing on stage during Glorious Pharmacy's show at the Midi Modern Music Festival 2003.

then-girlfriend Meimei and film director Zhang Yuedong moved through the stage dressed in pajamas and mimed sex. The full-band rendition of *SIMPLE TRUTH* included a big cardboard mouth and nose to illustrate the simple truths articulated in the lyrics: a sock tied to fishing wire showed that snot can drip into the mouth, but that spit cannot drip into the nose (see Chapter 3). For the release in 2008 of the second studio album *Rumbling Footsteps* 腳步聲陣陣, Glorious Pharmacy collaborated with avant-garde theater maker Meng Jinghui. Among other things, they acted out a robbery, which on the album is a prelude to the title track.

These cross-media connections seem natural developments from Xiao He's interest in rural stage traditions, such as his collaborations with the Longzaitian 龍在天 Shadow Puppet Troupe for a show in 2009. He has also collaborated with

Song Yuzhe and Peking Opera percussionists, for instance on the twenty-minute *SONG OF LIES* 謊言歌 (since 2007, only live), which is based on a lengthy folk 民間 text: "Please forgive me, I am incapable of lying ... my wife's twenty, we've been married for twenty-five years."

Xiao He's taste for live improvisation and audience interaction can sometimes lead to awkward situations, for instance when people in the audience left during a version of *SWING OH SWING* in a rock bar in 2004, possibly offended by Xiao He's singing about peeing on the audience's heads and into their beers. At a show in Rotterdam in 2009, the audience's initial participation quickly died; fifty Dutch yuppies waited passively while Xiao He just sat on stage until fellow musicians Yan Jun and Zhang Jian started singing, in Mandarin, "Time's up, just get off the stage!"

Glorious Pharmacy's collaboration with artists, filmmakers and audiences result in invitations for the band to play at exhibition openings and art festivals. Additionally, Xiao He has acted in experimental theater and in a number of films, including the lead role as watermelon seller in Zhang Yuedong's *Mid-Afternoon Barks* 下午狗叫 (2007) and a cameo in Lou Ye's *Summer Palace* 頤和園 (2006).<sup>53</sup> In most of these productions Xiao He was also involved in the music. He has performed to screenings of silent films on a number of occasions, most often to the Shanghai film *The Goddess* 神女 (1934, d. Wu Yonggang) – for instance, in Brussels in November 2007. Xiao He also invited Zhang Yuedong to create video projections for solo shows between 2007 and 2010, and occasionally for the modern dance group TAO Studio. Finally, *A DAOIST FROM LAO MOUNTAIN* 崂山道士, the opening song of *Rumbling Footsteps*, is based on the score and dialogues of an eponymous 1981 clay puppet animation film produced by the state-owned Shanghai Film Studio of Fine Arts.

The only major exception to Xiao He's reflective theatricality is his solo album *Birds that Can Fly High Don't Land on the Backs of Oxen that Can't Run Fast* (2002). This album, a live recording at the Little River bar where Xiao He used to improvise weekly, includes back-

<sup>53</sup> *Interrogation* 審問記, 2003 by Kang He and *Dialogue and Rebuttal* 對話與反詰, 2006 by Wang Xiaoxin, script by Gao Xingjian.

ground noises of people drinking and applauding. In short, it adheres to the esthetics of folk music, making the show's informal setting and casual audience-interaction explicit, without reflecting on its artificiality and the possibility of the singer playacting. This adherence is partially the result of record company Modern Sky's packaging. To be sure, folk-style make-believe and the trope of the lovelorn starving artist have been important to Xiao He, especially around 2000. Nevertheless, on many other occasions he has challenged folk's clichéd sincerity. In 2007 he recorded Zhou Yunpeng's album *Chinese Children* 中國孩子 in his home studio, adding playful noises to the music of this blind singer/songwriter. A CHILD'S COMMUNIST DREAM 一個兒童的共產主義夢想 starts with applause and Zhou Yunpeng asking: "You're still recording?," to which Xiao He replies "No, not at all," and we hear glasses clinking, people leaving and congratulations on completing the album. Then Zhou sings the first verse. The song ends with a short interview on how many songs they recorded, and so on. On the one hand A CHILD'S COMMUNIST DREAM continues folk's unadorned openness, with Zhou Yunpeng as authentic artist, but on the other hand it reveals the artificiality of the process. The two layers could not happen simultaneously in real time. In sum, the make-believe of *Birds that Can Fly High Don't Land on the Backs of Oxen that Can't Run Fast* is Xiao He's, but should be seen as one of his works among many, most of which expose and complicate make-believe.

### Faye Wong's Slip of the Tongue

IDIOTS 白痴 (2001) is the only instance of humor in Faye Wong's oeuvre. Whereas the music is serious, Lam Chik's lyrics contain an intentional mistake that triggers their reading as parody, with a critique of humanity's mad dash for progress as its subtext:

哪怕沒有辦法一定有說法	Even if there's no solution, we can always offer an explanation.
就算沒有鴿子一定有烏鴉	If there are no pigeons, there are always crows.
固執無罪 夢想有價	There's nothing wrong with obstinacy, dreaming has its value...
讓他們驚訝	Let them be surprised!

甚麼海角 甚麼天涯	Whatever corners of the sea, whatever limits of the sky,
明天我要攀越喜馬拉雅	tomorrow I will climb the Himalayas.
甚麼高樓 甚麼大廈	Skyscrapers, so what? High-rise, so what?
鋼鐵能煉成最幸福的家	Steel can be turned into the happiest families!

我們不傻 我們不傻	We're no fools, we're no fools,
我們偉大 我們不傻	We're the greatest, we're no fools!
昨天比明天要更好沒錯啦	Yesterday will be better than tomorrow, make no mistake...
是明天要更好是我唱錯啦	That's 'Tomorrow will be better'! I just made a mistake.
我們大家 光明正大	Everyone, glory is just and great!
來張開嘴吧	Come on, open your mouths!

嘻嘻哈哈劈哩啪啦	Hihi haha, pili pala ...
只有天才聽懂了我的話	It takes a genius to get what I'm saying.

呼嚕哇喇咿咿呀呀	Yalu waci, yiyi yaya ...
烏鴉的嘴巴從不說臟話	Never did a dirty word leave the crow's mouth.
嘻嘻哈哈劈哩啪啦	Hihi haha, pili pala ...
你們以為我們罵誰來呀	And you thought we came to yell at somebody!
莫非我們的嗓子太邇邊	Could it be that our throats have been too sloppy?

In order to hear *IDIOTS* as parody, the words need to be understood as antiphrasis, that is, it must be assumed that Faye Wong means the opposite of what she sings. The song's commissioning as the theme song of *Big Shot's Funeral* 大腕 (2001, d. Feng Xiaogang) supports this reading, as the film satirizes commercialism in the PRC. However, without this context the antiphrasis becomes obscure, and the music provides no clue.

Additionally, most mainstream popular music works hard to deny the possibility of a gap between sung words and their subtext. Pop stardom is about true belief. Rather than reflective, the pop singer's interaction with the audience is hyper-make-believe. Wang Leehom addressed the audience when he changed the chorus of *SET YOUR HEART FREE* 放開你的心 from "Baby, I love you" to "Taipei, I love you" during his *Heroes of Earth* 蓋世英雄 tour in 2006. The main difference with, say, X.T.X. or Second Hand Rose, who also dress up and address the audience directly, is a sense of duality. Liang Long acknowledges that he plays a role, and Second Hand Rose's music comments on sociopolitical reality, whereas pop stars rarely foreground a dichotomy between the identities and situations of their stardom and those of grim or ordinary reality, to the point that their appearances are egocentric and escapist. This is supported by the typical intermingling of biography, star persona and film roles in fan biographies of Chinese stars, from Zhou Xuan to Leslie Cheung.

Pop stars do explicitly reenact film roles and clips in their live shows. Leslie Cheung, when on stage, referred frequently to his film career (Chapter 3). In his 2007 tour, Jacky Cheung included a short opera based on the film *Perhaps Love* 如果愛 (2005, d. Peter Chan). Jay Chou reenacts parts of his role in *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2002, d. Zhang Yimou) by flying over the audience in golden armor. However, these sequences are self-enclosed make-believe. Only when the scripted song is over and the illusion fades does the singer address the audience, make elaborate comments on the framing of the songs (expensive dresses, thank to choreographers), have a drink and crack jokes. But in these reflective moments the singer performs his or her casual self, and again theatrical duplicity is not made explicit.

This also means that pop stars avoid transgressive emotional displays. Although for instance Jay Chou shows that humor is by no means absent, mainstream pop music remains dominated by the pathos of romantic ballads.<sup>54</sup> Their sentimentalism, or *shanqing* 煽情, is similar to that of mainstream films and TV programs, such as *Titanic* (1997, d. James Cameron), Korean drama series (*Hallyu* 韓流, from 2000) and the final appeals of the contestants of *Super Girl*

<sup>54</sup> A number of Chou's lyrics contain playfulness and humor, most notably *OLD INDIAN TURTLEDOVE* 印地安老斑鳩 (2000), *WILLIAM'S CASTLE* 威廉古堡 (2001), *MILAN'S LITTLE BLACKSMITH* 米蘭的小鐵匠 (2002), *CHAOTIC DANCE SPRING AUTUMN* 亂舞春秋 (2004), *NONSENSICAL* 扯 (2007), *MR. MAGIC* 魔术先生 (2008) and *UNCLE JOKER* 乔克叔叔 (2008). Additionally, *S.H.E.'S EXCUSE* 借口 is a parody of Chou's *LISTEN TO YOUR MOTHER* 听妈妈的话. Cf. Moskowitz 2010:95-99.

(2005) to SMS voters.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, there is a tradition of weeping songs and (semi-)professionalized wailers at Chinese weddings and funerals, and during physical labor. However, whereas traditional ceremonies and popular audiovisual works dramatize the *act* of crying, related pop songs and popular music in general rarely feature its sound (even though ‘tear’ and ‘crying’ are its most frequently used words). Andy Lau doesn’t cry in his hit song *MEN, CRY FOR IT’S NO SIN* 男人哭吧不是罪 (2000). In the rare examples of Pu Shu’s *THOSE FLOWERS* 那些花 (1999) and David Tao’s *THE MOON OVER YOUR HEART* (2002) it is not the singer who sobs, but an absent lover. These songs do not relive crying or show it, but comment on it. Popular music seems to present an otherworldly, almost cartoonesque realm, in which tears and violence only exist in a transfigured and estheticized way. The star persona exists in this virtual world, but is also restricted to it. Apparently it is a convention that tears render this otherwise sentimental world ridiculous, too traumatically real and/or no longer make-believable. I will now turn to this virtual world.

### §3 Extraordinary Spaces

So far, I have focused on the boundary between musician and audience, and on how artists negotiate this relation by assuming various roles, ranging from the transgressive hooligan and clown to the make-believable troubadour and star. Instead of a bipartite structure of actor and audience, I will now take a step back to consider the tripartite structure of stage, theater space and ordinary world. The theater space is a heterotopia, structurally outside ordinary hegemony. I will investigate the dynamics between ordinary and extraordinary reality in cinema, soundscapes and discos. How does music create space?

#### Film Music

*Swordsman* 笑傲江湖 (1990, d. King Hu) is the first film in a trilogy supervised by Tsui Hark and based on Jin Yong’s martial arts novel *The Smiling Proud Wanderer* 笑傲江湖 (1967). It starts with rapid strumming of a pipa to a black screen. This is followed by a framing title, “During the Wanli period of the Ming dynasty,” on a background of iridescent clouds. The silence of the night accompanies images of embroidering and candlelight. Then we hear the low sound of a gong as more titles explain the location as the imperial library. Erratic pipa plucking creates tension, as we see, but do not hear, the embroiderer pass out. The first on-screen sound is the fluttering of a cape as we see a hazy shot of a nightly thief flying over roof tops. Dry clicks provide sync points with the opening of a drawer and the theft of a sacred scroll. The ambient sound of the wind, visually translated by the flickering of candlelight, is enmeshed in a low drone as the highly-skilled thief escapes in the night.

Most action scenes in *Swordsman* are similarly accompanied by anxiety-provoking acoustic strumming and plucking, with the lengthier scenes elaborated into strikingly independent folk tunes (arranged by Romeo Díaz). Visually, the superhuman abilities of the martial arts masters are illustrated with special effects, including groundbreaking shots of acrobatic flying. Exaggerated sounds, such as the fluttering in the opening scene, serve to render these images – hazy and shot from unexpected angles – continuous and make-believable. Given sound’s preci-

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<sup>55</sup> Wu 2008.

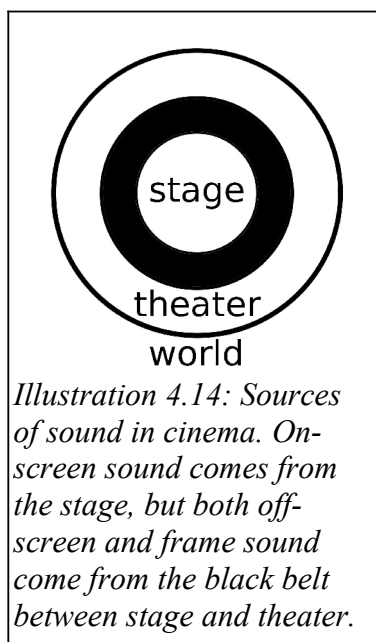
sion, it is also used to punctuate sword stabs and gunshots, many of whose visuals are absent or unclear.<sup>56</sup>

Just like the special sound effects discussed above, dialogues are typically on-screen. The ‘magnetic effect’ of on-screen images is strong enough to let the lip-synching go almost unnoticed, even in the case of the main culprit, a eunuch played by a male actor (Shun Lau) but with a female voice.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the abundance of pi-pa-based folk music, *Swordsman* is dominated by the pentatonic melody of the theme song HERO OF HEROES 滄海一聲笑. Composed by James Wong, the song became an instant hit across Asia after the film’s release.<sup>58</sup> Its melody appears numerous times throughout the film, usually slowed down and with a broad synthesizer sound. It is loosely associated with lead character Ling (played by Sam Hui) and the stolen scroll. At a few points the song becomes on-screen music. The first time is when Ling learns it from two martial arts masters as they are being pursued over water (0’ 30’ 40-0’ 33’ 10). Their intoxicating and heartfelt singing is violently



Illustration 4.13: Ling (Sam Hui) and Yue (Cecilia Yip) in *Swordsman*.



interrupted by a fierce battle in which the old friends suffer fatal wounds while protecting each other. After their narrow escape they repeat the song, now tragically, and bid the world farewell (0’ 37’ 08-0’ 38’ 40). Later, a drugged Ling repeats a condensed version of these scenes (1’ 15’ 44-1’ 17’ 44). Finally, part of the plot of *Swordsman* circles around the confusion of the score of HERO OF HEROES and the stolen martial arts scroll. Ling plays the song to his sect leader to prove this scroll is a mere score, while ironically commenting on the loss of brotherhood in a power-drunk world (1’ 38’ 50-1’ 39’ 53). During all of these instances the song starts on-screen, with a zither or lute as accompaniment. If the lip-synching is convincing to begin with, it definitely ceases to be so when percussion and orchestra join after the second verse.<sup>59</sup>

In this analysis I have introduced a terminology borrowed from the French composer and film music theorist Michel Chion, who distinguishes between on-screen and off-screen sound, and

<sup>56</sup> Chion 1994:60-61.

<sup>57</sup> This, as well as the cross-dressing of the sect leader’s daughter Kiddo (played by the singer Cecilia Yip), prepares the critically acclaimed gender ambiguity of the sequel, *Swordsman II: Asia the Invincible* 笑傲江湖之東方不敗 (1992, d. Tsui Hark.).

<sup>58</sup> Both in its Cantonese version, sung by Wong, Tsui Hark and Sam Hui, and its Mandarin version, sung by Wong, Hark and Lo Ta-yu.

<sup>59</sup> Chion 1994:80-81.

what I will call ‘frame sound’ in the present context. On-screen sound relates to events that are visible on the screen, such as dialogue. Off-screen sound is equally part of stage reality or diegesis, but relates to events that are not visible, such as a train that has not yet arrived or debris that lands behind the audience after an explosion. By contrast, frame sound, such as voice-over and musical underscoring, is not part of stage reality because the story’s characters do not hear it. Therefore it also called non-diegetic sound.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, it also doesn’t belong to theater reality in the same way that, for instance, applause after the screening does. The intermediacy of the sound score is evidenced by the orchestra that in early 20<sup>th</sup> century America was seated in a pit between the screen (stage reality) and the audience (theater reality). The temporary plot-suspending power of *HERO OF HEROES* further illustrates the intermediary state of the music. Moreover, in *Swordsman* the song signifies utopia. In the final analysis this relates to the film’s undermining of realism and strict chronology, partly inspired by storytelling.

## Faye Wong in Wong Kar-wai’s Cinema

Ever since 1930s Shanghai, the exchange of personnel, sounds and images between Chinese popular music and cinema has been the norm across the board. This is clearest in the films of Wong Kar-wai. First I will consider the theatricality of Wong Kar-wai’s films, paying special attention to Faye Wong. Then I will discuss how these film roles are integrated into Faye Wong’s star persona.

Botz-Bornstein describes Wong Kar-wai’s characters as dandies who refuse to grow up and cope with lost love, and hence live in an almost virtual manga world:

Wong’s characters stroll aimlessly through urban settings like dandies. And like dandies, they are neither opposed to their capitalist environment nor fully integrated into it, but “play the game” of urban life in a strangely indifferent way, developing ... an unreal, dreamlike mode of existence.<sup>61</sup>

Wong Kar-wai alienates and stylizes realistic people, daily objects, geographic locations and historic dates and reframes them in dreamlike comic-book settings. This setting maintains the make-believe and self-contained nature of cinema’s fourth wall, but is itself, just like manga and Peking Opera, explicitly not realistic or mimetic but stylized and abstract. Flashbacks and flash-forwards, the characters’ imaginations and their parts in the plot they share are difficult to disentangle. The frame sound of voice-over and music is exceptionally important in structuring Wong Kar-wai’s cinematic language.

Faye Wong’s roles in Wong Kar-wai’s films are named after her: Ah Faye 阿菲 in *Chungking Express* 重慶森林 (1994) and Shirley Wong 王靖雯 in *2046* (2005). Ah Faye works the cash register of her uncle’s fast-food stand, frequently to the sound of *CALIFORNIA DREAMING* by the Mamas & the Papas, which signifies her adventurous and absentminded nature.<sup>62</sup> The song is playing when Cop 633 (played by Tony Leung) slowly walks up to the fast-food counter. It only

<sup>60</sup> Paraphrasing Chion 1994:73.

<sup>61</sup> Botz-Bornstein 2008:99.

<sup>62</sup> Takeshi Keneshiro comments on his first encounter with Ah Faye in a voice-over to a sequence of freeze frames (0’39’00), which is the model for Stephen Chow time-freeze scene in his *Journey to the West in Brag*.

turns out to be on-the-air sound when the two of them need to shout to make themselves understood: “Do you like loud music?” “Yes, the louder the better.”

Ah Faye falls in love with Cop 633 and manages to get hold of the keys to his apartment.<sup>63</sup> She defines her first invasion of his apartment as a dream in her only moment of voice-over. The scene starts with a meta-reflective joke in which the shop owner tells an Indian employee not to daydream of becoming a pop star, and to stop using a radish as a microphone (0'59' 30). “Radishes are to eat.” He then goes over to Ah Faye, who is resting her head on her palms and rolling her eyes:

Owner: “And you?”

Ah Faye: “Me? I’m not dreaming.”

Owner: “That’s right, you’re not dreaming. Just sleepwalking.”

Ah Faye: “Yes... Sleepwalking, that must be it.”

Ah Faye [*voice-over*]: “That afternoon I dreamed that I went to his home. When I left that house, I thought I would wake up. Who knows, from some dreams you never wake up.”

Not only does this scene poke fun at Faye Wong’s stardom – the Indian is singing into his radish-mike as she narrates – it also positions Cop 633’s apartment as a dreamlike playground for a childish mischievous Ah Faye. Ah Faye’s dishwashing gloves and her favorite song protect her in this ‘male space’ (1' 04' 10),<sup>64</sup> but only when we hear Faye Wong singing DREAM PERSON 夢中



*Illustration 4.15: Ah Faye (Faye Wong) in Chungking Express.*

<sup>63</sup> Faye polishes a glass window behind which Cop 633 is standing, as if to caress him (43'30). Then cut to Faye polishing a piece of glass in front of the camera with Cop 633 in the back, as if to caress the camera.

<sup>64</sup> Yeh 2005:133.

人 does she take over completely, putting her own slippers under the couch and sleeping pills in Cop 633's drinking water, adding fish to the aquarium, dressing in a stewardess outfit belonging to his ex-girlfriend, changing the wrappings of canned food, throwing a mock tantrum when she finds a long hair in his bed, and eventually deleting a call from his ex-girlfriend from his answering machine (1' 07' 20-1' 11' 30). *DREAM PERSON*, a cover of a Cranberries song, features again during the end credits. Its lyrics play with the uncertainty and excitement of having a dream lover, which could be what Cop 633 is to Ah Faye and vice versa, and finally what the audience is to Faye Wong. There is even a two-second MTV-like shot in which Faye Wong looks directly into the camera and shakes her head to the music, as if to say: "Yes, it is a dream, but I am a star"(0' 08' 31).

Whereas music is usually secondary to the plot – enhancing its make-believability, adding to the tension and tragedy of its events – in these four minutes the music dictates the rhythm and content of the images. Wong Kar-wai does not interrupt the song to make it suit the images, but edits the images to fit the song's

length.<sup>65</sup> In general, Wong Kar-wai's unconventional use of music feeds into his virtual, manga-like film style. In many scenes it never becomes clear how much is real, in the sense that they happen in the shared cinematic reality of the actors, and how much happens inside the individual imagination of each of them. Both Cop 633 taking sleeping pills and the role-switching at the end, where he has become the owner of the fast-food stand and Ah Faye has become a stewardess, are hard to believe, even within the film.



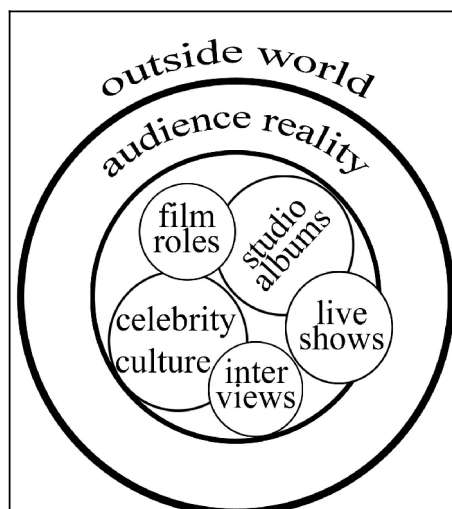
*Illustration 4.16: Ah Faye (Faye Wong) in Chungking Express.*

## Wong Kar-wai in Faye Wong's Stardom

Stars such as Faye Wong appear in a variety of media, such as cinema, studio recordings, live shows and celebrity talk shows. These media have different conventions concerning authenticity and the relationship between actor and performed role. Film roles may impair the make-believability of Faye Wong's ballads. Can Faye Wong's stardom hold these elements together?

Brian Hu argues that Hong Kong pop audiences' knowledge of stars underlies "The KTV Aesthetic" (2006) that integrates music albums, tabloids, TV shows and films. According to Hu, intertextual connections among these media should be taken as deliberate attempts to appeal to the audience's prior cultural knowledge. For instance, when Andy Lau plays a dance instructor in *Dance of a Dream* 愛君如夢 (2001, d. Wai Keung Lau) and parodies a song and choreography of Leslie Cheung, so stepping outside the plot, it "does not break the fantasy of the story since that fantasy had already included the audience's extra-cinematic experiences of Lau from the

<sup>65</sup> "As soon as the song begins ... the mobile camera sheds its status as the observer of a scene, and begins to express the character's inner world" (Hu 2006: 420). See Yeh 2005:136 on Wong Kar-wai's use of music.



*Illustration 4.17: Precursory overview of pop stardom. Audience reality exceeds well-defined theater spaces and mixes with public space.*

very start of the film.”<sup>66</sup> A subtler example would be Sam Hui’s performance of HERO OF HEROES in *Swordsman*, as he also has a singing career.

Although Faye Wong’s roles in Wong Kar-wai’s films borrow from her biography, these roles also diverge from her star persona in playful ways, for instance by presenting her as a waitress and air hostess. Ah Faye’s behavior, including her eventual trip to California, is perfectly comprehensible within the film’s narrative, but at the same time such subtextual connections implicate contemporary Chinese audiences who most likely know about Faye Wong’s stay in the USA in 1991-1992. In short, the film role enhances rather than compromises her make-believability as a singer because it presents an additional appearance that carries fans away in an autonomous dream world. Meta-reflectiveness involves fans through intimate references to Faye Wong’s career, and thus serves to strengthen hy-

per-make-believe. Additionally, as I have argued in Chapter 3, the suggestion of a private, true self within or behind the public image is important to Faye Wong’s star persona. Ah Faye is a relatively rounded screening of that private, true self.

## Jay Chou’s Sound Effects

In Chapter 2 I noted that Jay Chou’s albums are carefully planned to encompass a wide range of potential genres, including hip-hop, country & western, the Chinese Wind and Latin, and that some albums are packaged around the imagery of one musical and/or lyrical theme: these include the modern soldier of *Common Jasmin Orange* 七里香 (2004), the kung fu master of the EP *Huo Yuen Chia* 霍元甲 (2006), the imperial soldier of the EP *Golden Armour* 黄金甲 (2006), the cowboy of *On the Run* (2007) and the magician-cum-joker of *Capricorn* 魔杰座 (2008). Additionally, Chou has presented himself as gentle-*wenrou* lover, sports car racer, basketball player and classical pianist. Album titles such as *Fantasy* (2001, the English title is transliterated rather than translated in Chinese), *The Eight Dimensions* (2002, literally ‘octave space’), *Still Fantasy* 依然范特西 (2006) and *The Era* 跨時代 (2010, literally ‘transcending eras’) suggest that Chou’s music provides access to an extraordinary and magical world.

Like the multiple personas of such stars as the ‘ever-changing’ 百變 Anita Mui, Chou’s adoption of diverse personas can be seen as a form of costume play, a term abbreviated and disseminated by the Japanese as ‘cosplay’ or simply ‘cos.’ Although cos-



*Illustration 4.18: Jay Chou on a promotional poster for his 2008 album Capricorn.*

<sup>66</sup> Hu 2006: 414.

play potentially threatens make-believability by exposing a star's artificiality, in general this effect is neutralized by Chinese pop's hyper-make-believe. In the case of Jay Chou, unwanted reflectiveness is subdued by those of his roles that are rooted in his biography, in addition to subtextual connections to his family, and songs such as *BESIEGED FROM ALL SIDES* 四面楚歌 (2005), which reenacts his antagonism with the tabloid press. This tension is played out in the first feature film Chou directed, *Secret* 不能說的祕密 (2007). It combines details from his biography with a romantic ghost story. Whereas the romance renders Chou's mundane piano lessons magical, vice versa its subtextual references – Chou playing his younger self – render the love story make-believable. These constructions suggest that Chou can adopt different identities if he so wishes while remaining himself and in control.

Jay Chou's interest in film started with the album *Ye Hui Mei* 葉惠美 (2003), named after his mother. Many of its songs include sound effects and samples that suggest cinematic images. The opening track of *Ye Hui Mei*, *IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER* 以父之名, suggests a mafia film, with Italian prayers, opera singing and gunshots. These sounds, as well as the dripping rain of *YOU CAN HEAR* 妳聽得到, constitute another layer that differs from the music 'itself.' If one were to consider these songs as film soundtracks, this layer is off-screen sound that is part of (invisible) stage reality. The music highlights the make-believe narrative that evolves in the world of the sound effects.

Typically, the off-screen sound effects take center stage in the transitional frames of intro, bridge and outro. *THIRD YEAR SECOND CLASS* 三年二班 starts with ping-pong balls, a school bell and a public announcement, suggesting a high school campus. Then, echoing scenes in which a theme played on an on-screen zither is picked up by the pit orchestra (as in *Swordsman*), the ping-pong balls of *THIRD YEAR SECOND CLASS* fall into the rhythm of the music.<sup>67</sup> Their erratic yet rhythmic sounds even play the solo in the bridge (2' 10-3' 30), ending in a harp arpeggio. In short, these sounds oscillate between make-believe stage-reality and frame reflectiveness.

Similarly, *DOUBLE BLADE* 雙刀 gradually integrates samples of sword fights into its music. Although the song contains sounds of fist fights earlier on, the hyperbolic sword clashes are only introduced halfway through (2' 36-3' 00), accompanied by the main theme played on wind instruments and strings in half-time to give it the typical feel of martial arts film music. After this transitional bridge, there is a short stop a few measures later (3' 38-3' 40), before the sword-fighting sounds are fully integrated into the rest of the music, contributing to the song's finale.

Although the imagery of kung fu was most likely part of *DOUBLE BLADE* from an early phase of planning by Chou's record company Alfa Music, in the end the music was completed prior to the video clip. Translating this to logical priority, the cinema sounds should not be seen as a soundtrack to an invisible film, but as illustrating the general idea of the song and materializing images presented in the lyrics. The video clip of *DOUBLE BLADE* does not reenact the precise acts audible in the songs, but superimposes additional layers of on-screen and off-screen sounds. Alexi Tan made a 13-minute film out of material shot in Los Angeles for this song, and eventually made two clips of this. In the first, Jay Chou walks the streets with a young Chinese-looking boy, with the kung fu sounds only relating to the comic book the boy reads. At the end of this clip, which is the intro of the second version, a criminal gang abducts the boy. The second, most

<sup>67</sup> Chion 1994:80.

widely viewed clip consists of over-the-top fight scenes in which Jay Chou defeats the gang and rescues the boy.

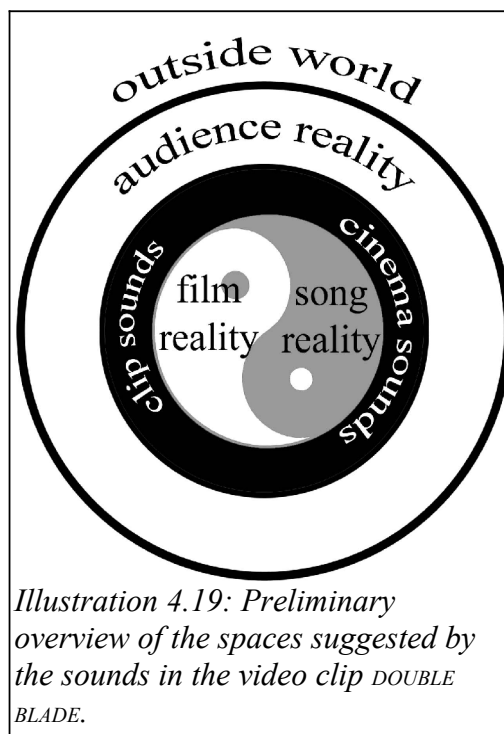
These fight scenes add numerous points at which we both see and hear swords clashing in perfect synchronization. Besides the intro and outro that contain on-screen dialogue, there are two points at which the music is interrupted for several seconds to add tension and drama to the visual narrative: an opponent going down after taking a blow, or new opponents entering. However, the sword-fighting sounds of the original sound recording remain invisible. This gives them an awkward status in the diagram based on Chion's classification of sounds: they are not really part of the music, but their status as off-screen sounds is also no longer tenable (see Illustration 4.19).<sup>68</sup>

## Soundscapes

In 2008, the luxury fashion brand Louis Vuitton commissioned the New York-based new media company *Soundwalk* to produce audio guides to Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. These guides are in effect the soundtracks of invisible films. The website [www.louisvuittonsoundwalk.com](http://www.louisvuittonsoundwalk.com) offers maps and three ten-minute audio guides through the three metropolises with voice-overs by actresses Gong Li, Joan Chen and Shu Qi respectively, and also offers the visitor the opportunity to purchase the full 60-minute version. One difference from Jay Chou's albums is the centrality of audience participation: fashionable young people are intended to listen to the recordings on their mobile music devices while actually taking the tours. The sound of the voice-overs is typically low, dry and near, and enhances intimacy by the actresses introducing themselves and consistently addressing the listener as "you."

Have you arrived at the Mansion Hotel? Find yourself a seat and sit down. Can you get me a cup of tea? Thank you. *[pause, slow cello music]* I am Joan Chen. I'm an actress, and also a director. I was born in Shanghai. I'm meeting you today because I am going to tell you a love story, a beautiful story. Like so many love stories, it is full of hope and despair.

The narratives are devised to carry listeners away in nostalgia the same way that an old photo album might do, as they tell of romances that once (might have) developed in these locations. A layer of light music by Kubert Leung and Albert Yu adds sentimentality and drama. Authenticating street sounds, such as the opening of doors, footsteps on the pavement and a bustling café with high ceilings, present a third layer that resembles off-screen sound.



*Illustration 4.19: Preliminary overview of the spaces suggested by the sounds in the video clip DOUBLE BLADE.*

<sup>68</sup> Chou continued this technique on subsequent albums, most notably in the Disney beginning and helicopter blades of MY TERRITORY 我的地盤 (2004), the touch-tone phone dialing of BLUE STORM 藍色風暴 (2005), radio static noise of NOCTURNES 夜曲 (2005), camera shutter sounds of BESIEGED FROM ALL SIDES (2005) and short dialogues before songs.

Acoustic ecology projects rarely contain voice-overs. Whereas Jay Chou provides a focal point in his multiplicities, both in image (face) and in sound (lead melody), the author of the soundscape retreats into the background to make way for relatively anarchic, un-orchestrated and ordinary reality. However, in liner notes, on websites and through other frames, these projects are often connected to outside reality, such as the preservation and reevaluation of old, lower-class neighborhoods in Ou Ning's *Da Zhalan* 大栅栏 (from 2005, Beijing), Yan Jun's *Qiu Jiang Lu* 虬江路 (2008, Shanghai), and Anson Mak's soundscapes in Kwun Tong 官塘 (2009, 2010, Hong Kong).

This trend started with *Sound and the City: City – Sound Environment* (2007), which consists of a book and two CDs. It was the result of cooperation between British and Chinese sound artists in 2005 and 2006, including Yan Jun, Zafka, Brian Eno, David Toop, Peter Cusack and Clive Bell. The first CD consists of sounds submitted by residents of Beijing, Chongqing, Guangzhou and Shanghai. Its recordings of newspaper hawkers, knife-grinders, subway announcements and singing school children are remarkably effective in evoking space, both in terms of location and in terms of movement across different coordinates, near and far. This illustrates what Chion calls causal listening, listening for the source of sound production, sometimes aided by verbal and visual frames. A respondent described her favorite sound:

When I was a kid, I often took a walk with my grandparents on the street near the Liberation Monument, and we would drown in the hubbub of the chatting around us and the merchants' hawking. Only when the bell on the monument rang did I realize that I had entered another world: an elegant, quiet and serene place, a shangri-la 桃源 induced by the bell's sound. Listening to this celestial sound became the joy of my childhood. My childhood memories were carved into that bell sound.<sup>69</sup>

The second CD, consisting of commissioned works, as well as Laurent Jeanneau's *Soundscape China* 音景中國 (2007), draws more attention to the recording and mixing processes. Li Qiang, who accompanied Robert Jarvis in Chongqing, recounts:

Robert played back the recording [we made during the day] to us in the night club. It was fantastic. All the notes have an uncertain quality to them, the bell, the phone, the trombone, the duck... but you could feel the emotional shifts. Robert explained to us that he had employed a lot of modern technologies, such as splitting the original sound into numerous tiny little notes, dispersing them and putting them back together. I can't believe these are the sounds we encounter everyday, and that, with Robert's processing, these sounds can become so magical as to move beyond the usual sense of sounding good.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Wu Yu'an about Chongqing, in British Council 2008:160.

<sup>70</sup> British Council 2008:116.

Sound recording divorces sounds from their sources. Although audiences often do not see the production of sound in, say, a telephone conversation or a studio album, these sounds still suggest visual and haptic events.<sup>71</sup>

The sound of water is instantly recognizable, highly versatile and teeming with (localized) cultural meaning. In 1960s and 1970s ‘happenings’ and the Fluxus movement, water sounds represented indeterminacy and ancient Asian wisdom.<sup>72</sup> In the PRC, it suggests the eternal flow of time, or at least it has done so since Shen Congwen’s 1934 essay “History is a River” 歷史是一條河 made this expression a commonplace. On *Journey to the East* 東游記 (2006) FM3 member Zhang Jian plays samples of a quayside to Wuna’s guqin playing (part two, 20:35-27:25). The combination creates the impression of a traditional Chinese *shanshuihua* 山水畫 ‘landscape painting’ – literally, a ‘mountain and water painting.’<sup>73</sup> The vastness of the water surface contrasts with the fragile human figure presented by the guqin. A distant foghorn occasionally heard in the sample subtly connects the music with the contemporary reality of Shanghai as one of the world’s largest cargo ports. The sounds of rustling water in Wang Fan’s *Five Primary Elements* 五行 (2006) have more obviously been manipulated, as the sound stays mostly in the higher treble regions. In the works of Huan Qing and especially Wang Changcun, water sounds are still more abstract. The mimetic link retreats to the background and gives way to a play between the individuality of repetitive but well-defined waves and the collectivity of sustained fluttering and noise that arises out of these individual events.

Since 2007, Xiao He has used a MIDI keyboard that produces water sounds in different keys during improvisations, with the loudness and duration of the bubbling depending on how hard he presses the keys. This theatrical frame conflicts with the audience’s prior knowledge of the source and behavior of the sounds and thus creates a playful effect, which Xiao He then contrasts with, for instance, repetitive, echoey guitar-picking that sound like waves, and a MIDI-generated trombone solo. In this particular performance, recorded in 2008 and included as SHUI18 on Xiao He’s live improvisation album *The Performance of Identity*, the visual projections of slow-motion waterfalls, tornadoes and clouds in dark green tones support the serene atmosphere of human fragility. Like Chinese landscape painting, these sounds comment on water and mountains, rather than imitating them. Although, again, the author takes on a stronger presence through the explicit manipulation of sound, these waves suggest a multiplicity of positions and identities.

## Going Out

Karaoke oscillates between make-believe, unscripted performance and reflectiveness. It is make-believe because, just as in live shows by pop stars, fans immerse themselves completely in the event and dream of being a star, *that* star. It is unscripted performance because stage reality is permeable, as everyone takes a turn at the microphone; indeed, karaoke parlors provide additional microphones and percussion instruments, as well as alcohol, to secure maximum participation. But although the audience may be a close circle of friends (if there is an audience at all), and

<sup>71</sup> Chion quoted in Smalley 2007:39, cf. Auslander 1999:85-87.

<sup>72</sup> Kahn 1999: 243-288.

<sup>73</sup> Additionally, the indie record label Shanshui promotes experimental electronic music.

there may be no conventional stage, the microphone, and the reverb-drowned singing voice it produces, frame the performance as a theatrical event. Finally, it is reflective because sometimes these frames may be explicit – for instance, when someone parodies a singer, or his or her own superiors. If seen as reflective, karaoke ceases to be about becoming the star, and is instead about appropriating songs and roles to one's own repertoire, in which case the distance between the original and its karaoke rendition should be audible.

In the midst of these oscillations, which Jeroen de Kloet calls “multivocal opacity,” karaoke remains an *extra*-ordinary thing, similar to the carnival experience as read by Mikhail Bakhtin:<sup>74</sup>

All were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age.<sup>75</sup>

Just like carnival, the *extra*-ordinariness of discos is defined by their architectural, social and temporal frames – a town square or a club behind closed doors, the week before Lent or a Saturday night. Unlike carnival, disco does not entail the complete reversal or (temporal) suspension of power and identity. Whereas Bakhtin argues that “footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance,”<sup>76</sup> the footlights of disco are fragmented, but not altogether absent.

In his book on youth sex culture and market reform in Shanghai, James Farrer writes:

Dance halls distort the visual and sonic space around the individual, creating intimacy, fragmenting social interactions, and making overt sexual display and play acceptable and ritualised, as if performed by someone else.<sup>77</sup>

Discotheques, clubs, dance halls and bars offer opportunities for transgressing proper boundaries, but (re)create inequalities too – and what is at stake is prestige, the feeling of being desirable and, occasionally, sex. Farrer:

The supposed triviality of dance hall play is its most successful ruse. It is what allows, for instance, a young woman to communicate sexual desire and desirability through dance without “meaning anything” – without revealing her hand. It is what allows married men and women to dance intimately with strangers without admitting to infidelity.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore I disagree with Lu Deping, who places discos in opposition to the serious world of work, career and family. Lu argues that in China legislation and social condemnation force disco into a grey area between regulated and unregulated or illegal societies. Whereas Lu argues for

<sup>74</sup> De Kloet 2010:135-137.

<sup>75</sup> Bakhtin 1968:10.

<sup>76</sup> Bakhtin 1968:7, cf 265.

<sup>77</sup> Farrer 2002:293.

<sup>78</sup> Farrer 2002:325.

the acceptance of disco, I see liminality as disco's *raison d'être*.<sup>79</sup> Although repression can be more or less severe, friction between disco and society at large cannot disappear altogether.

Their architecture enables discos to function as heterotopia. The interior design of a disco typically consists of a bar, a DJ stand, a dance floor and sitting areas. In the PRC, the bar is usually a relatively large island in the center of the room, pushing the DJ and dance floor to the wall opposite the entrance. The suspension of propriety on the dance floor – described as ecstasy or ‘oceanic’ experience – is embedded in social and material frames, such as a cover charge, musical taste, dress code, a number of architectural entrances (sometimes including elevators), wardrobes, and peripheral spaces such as private (karaoke) rooms, bars and rooms for live shows.

The group-oriented nature of Chinese disco-going adds another, social, frame. In his account of high-end clubs in Shanghai, Andrew Field writes:

While Westerners tend to prefer public drinking along an open bar, overseas and local Chinese tend to prefer the privacy of tables and *baofang* [包房, semi-enclosed private rooms with sofas and curtains on three sides], where they can enjoy the exclusive company of a small group of friends without being disturbed by social pirates. While Westerners tend to prefer beer or mixed drinks, overseas and local Chinese prefer Chivas, XO, Jack Daniels or other brand name drinks that confer high status on their bearers. ... Also, ordering a bottle of whiskey or champagne enables drinking to be a communal experience, shared by the group and often purchased and distributed by the highest-ranking male within the group.<sup>80</sup>

Almost all Chinese discos and many live houses and rock venues offer *baofang*, or at least designate a ‘consumption area’ where customers have to spend a minimum amount per table.<sup>81</sup> The spaces of nightlife in the 2000s are almost as stratified as the teahouse theater of the early 1900s, where “you are where you sit.”<sup>82</sup> Both the table tenders of the traditional teahouse theater and the floor managers of the 1990s club needed to recognize customers and seat them according to their status.<sup>83</sup> Drinking games common in these rooms are another similarity.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, the success of private KTV *baofang* over public karaoke further attests to the importance of social groups to Chinese nightlife.

Despite the lack of private spaces, group-oriented partying is recognizable at open-air concerts too. In these more open and carnivalesque settings, communal dancing prevails. In addition to occasional stage-diving and crowd-surfing, fans form congas, dance in circles or engage

<sup>79</sup> “The true meaning of interpreting disco is not restricted to scholarly research. It’s more important that we acknowledge that disco is an art [form], a cultural [expression], a part of our lives. It cannot eternally remain in limbo and play the part of hermaphrodite, it must transcend the boundaries of social taboo and help open up non-artistic spaces within daily, regulated society” (Lu 2007:135).

<sup>80</sup> Field 2008:32-33.

<sup>81</sup> Lu 2007:140.

<sup>82</sup> Goldstein 2007:63-69. The map that Goldstein provides alongside his account of these Peking Opera venues shows *baoxiang* 包厢, ‘box seats,’ on the first floor and a variety of seats on the ground floor.

<sup>83</sup> Goldstein 2007:70-71, Field 2008:37.

<sup>84</sup> Field 2008:36.

in a bizarre practice in which ten or twenty people run away from the stage, pushing everyone aside, and then run back again.

Teahouses and rock festivals are notoriously noisy, but the stage provides a focus. Dance floors and mosh pits offer alternative focal points for onlookers.<sup>85</sup> To the participants, the moments of physical proximity and loud music in the arena come closest to Bakhtian egalitarianism. But even on the dance floor and in the mosh pit there are rules and territories, evidenced by the occasional brawl.<sup>86</sup> In the carnivalesque, unscripted performance of the disco, boundaries between stage and venue and between audience and actor become porous and fade, while those between the venue and the ordinary world gain in importance. On the whole, discos dissolve some social differences, but outside-world social status remains visible.

## §4 Concluding Remarks

Almost all theater events discussed in this chapter show a degree of reflectiveness, regardless of their media – live show, studio recording or film appearance. The impression that reflectiveness is relatively dominant in Chinese popular music can be associated with the reflectiveness of traditional Chinese stage traditions, the stylized esthetics of martial arts novels and manga comics, and the permeability of dream and reality in Oriental philosophy. However, given the importance of credibility and make-believe in mainstream pop, I submit that it is characterized instead by that specific mixture and style of reflectiveness and make-believe which is typical of a location at a given time. For instance, engrossed listeners of romantic ballads may block out reflectiveness and be oblivious to who is singing and to the semantic content of the lyrics. Michel Chion, following Pierre Schaeffer, calls this ‘reduced listening.’<sup>87</sup> To Chion, reduced listening takes the sound as the object to be observed instead of as a vehicle for something else.

However, at the same time the song may be a cover and thus offer the possibility of reflecting on its differences with the original or with other covers. These differences, and larger overviews of the scene, open possibilities for discussing the artificiality of star personas. Daniel Wu’s ‘mockumentary’ *The Heavenly Kings* 四大天王 (2006) exposes this artificiality by following the boy band Alive, including their attempts to create success through scandal. Wu juxtaposes these scenes with interviews with cantopop stars that support his case. When the film was released, the Hong Kong

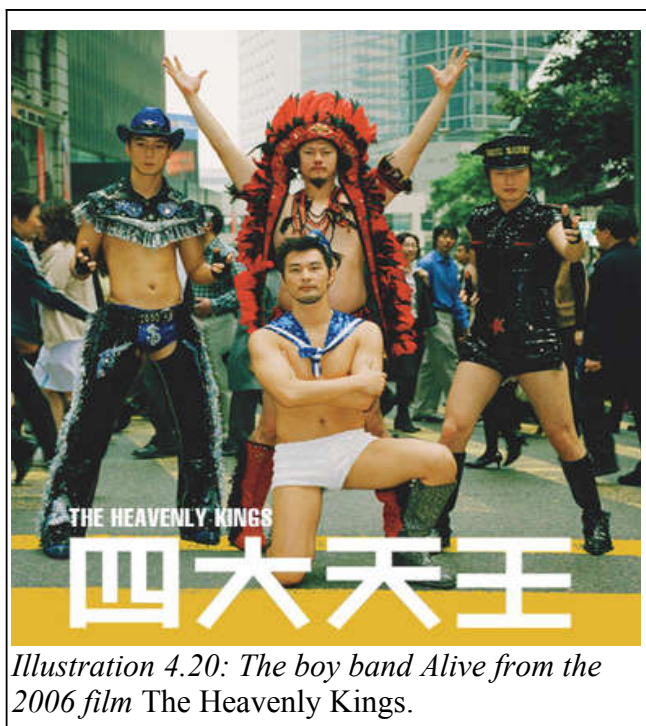


Illustration 4.20: The boy band Alive from the 2006 film *The Heavenly Kings*.

<sup>85</sup> The arena is called *wuchi* 舞池 ‘dance pool’ (Lu 2006:140), which is similar to the *chizi* 池子 ‘pool’ of Peking Opera. Field argues that the basic principle of Chinese clubbing is that ‘people enjoy being crowded into a tight place’ (Field 2008:23).

<sup>86</sup> See my account of X.T.X.’s show above, and Farrer 2002:309-310.

<sup>87</sup> Chion 1994:29.

tabloid press was displeased at being duped into promoting a boy band that had never been serious. However, far from being shocked, Hong Kong audiences seemed to have decided long ago to block out the artificiality of their celebrities.

In other words, mainstream pop is hyper-make-believe. Following the argument of Adam B. Seligman in *Ritual and its Consequences* (2008), I would argue that, like ritual, mainstream pop music creates a subjunctive, an ‘as if’ or ‘could be’ universe that helps make sense of erratic lived experience (the ‘real,’ in Lacanian terms) by editing it into a socially endorsed narrative (the big Other):

The subjunctive world of ritual resides in inherent tension with such a broken world, and such a subjunctive world is at least implicitly understood to be limited and temporary. Ritual, then, involves the endless work of building, refining, and rebuilding webs of relationships in an otherwise fragmented world. The work of ritual ceaselessly builds a world that, for brief moments, creates pockets of order, pockets of joy, pockets of inspiration. ... Once ritual is viewed in this way ... we come to realize that ritual is something that is happening to some extent all the time, in the most seemingly common, mundane aspects of our lives.<sup>88</sup>

Near the other end of the scale of theatrical explicitness, Xiao He and Top Floor Circus make attempts at subjunctive universes explicit. They reveal that subjunctive universes are make-believe, not in the sense that they are not true, but in the sense that they are piecemeal, require constant work, and involve choices. Nevertheless, even though their shows can render staged events relatively accessible, spontaneous and ‘ordinary,’ ultimately their frames, including the venue and their musicality, prevent them from becoming so mundane that they are non-theatrical. Although all music is indeed theatrical, in their uneventfulness and radical democracy, soundscapes occasionally and temporarily shed frames, cease to be music and move into a no-man’s land beyond theatricality.

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<sup>88</sup> Seligman 2008:180. Cf. Seligman 2008:7, 20.

# Chapter 5: Organizing Music

## §1 Evolution

“Huh-ooohw,” hovers an unstable, low male voice, “huh-eeehw.” A sudden Mountain-Song-like movement lifts the melody to a high pitch: like a rubber band stretched and then released, the voice howls: “ee-oo.” It remains high, but the volume now wavers and decreases, into a nasal falsetto. “li-ih-i-i,” on the last bit of breath. Silence again, a loud sigh “whiii,” followed by high, barely audible, “e-e-e” sounds. Low again: “whoo-oo-ee.” The melody now jumps back and forth between almost painfully high and low registers, while simultaneously working the overtones through changes of the vowel. Silence, another sigh, followed by a glissando. The sixth phrase is relatively conventional – a few drawn-out high notes with only microtonal fluctuations, briefly interrupted by a sudden dive into lower registers. Then the glockenspiel enters with a quiet tremolo.

*On Taoism* 道极 (1985) begins with composer Tan Dun singing the germ cell of the composition. A bass clarinet and bass bassoon take turns developing the melodic line provided by the voice, rendering the music almost monophonic: a single calligraphic-melodic line divided over the three solo instruments employs a palette of tone-colors on a canvas of strings.<sup>1</sup> The seven phrases of the opening, the seventh accompanied by the glockenspiel, also foreshadow the division of the thirteen-minute composition into seven parts. Variations of the vocal ‘refrain’ mark transitions between the composition’s noncentric fields – ‘verses’ in which sounds seem to meander more or less without direction – and its clusters, in which the music becomes dense, erupting in volume and speed.<sup>2</sup>

Tan Dun is trained in Western art music, and *On Taoism* resonates with its esthetics. In the words of Richard Middleton:

For traditional Western music aesthetics, as it emerged from the Enlightenment period, the individuality of each successive work should aim to guarantee what the artist’s creative method is set upon, namely, a means of exploring, modeling, representing *development* – personal, social, technical. This *Bildungsroman* mentality, not without power, still, even in pop music criticism, gave rise in the nineteenth century to two predominant interpretative models: music being related to *narrative*, on the one hand, [and] *organicism* on the other, with both cases governed by the Leitmotif of evolutionary change.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter I will focus on the evolutionary production of Chinese popular music. I use *evolutionary* to refer to any process that repeatedly goes through reproduction, variation and selection. These three steps also inform the division of this chapter in three main sections. Chinese popular music is made by reproducing sounds, varying songs and selecting stars.

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<sup>1</sup> Kouwenhoven 1991:14, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Utz 2002: 373-6, see also Mittler 1997:355.

<sup>3</sup> Middleton 2006:149.

## Organic Pieces

Let me first briefly outline my approach. In the above quote from Middleton's *Voicing the Popular* (2006), evolutionary change means progress, "a sense that time has a direction." In this chapter, rather than the teleology of organicism and Social Darwinism, evolution implies change beyond and often at odds with the pursuits of (individual) human beings. Furthermore, I will argue that *On Taoism* shows that the creativity and originality of art music do not shield it from the modest reproductions, variations and selections of evolutionary change, and indeed that art music performs the possibility of an evolutionary approach to music that focuses on change rather than progress.

*On Taoism* was inspired by funeral rituals and weeping songs from Hunan Province. Tan Dun recalls traveling back to his hometown after his grandmother, who had raised him, passed away:

When I arrived, I noticed that the villagers had special Taoist practices. They sang, they sprinkled wine over the body of my grandmother, they talked to the body. This kind of ritual was something which I grew up with as a child, but which I later forgot about.<sup>4</sup> ... Afterwards, in Beijing, I began to think about it. In that period, I was regarding myself as a new kind of Zhuangzi [the author of an ancient Daoist classic]. I talked a lot of Zhuangzi and felt very proud. ... [I wrote *On Taoism* in a week,] I wanted to write something in a single breath, just like a kid singing for himself. Basically, I used 'non-concept' and 'non-discipline' as a concept.<sup>5</sup>

Tan Dun's Daoism draws from syncretic popular religion, whose animism informs his views on the reciprocal relation between organism and milieu, composer and sound. His later *Organic Music* 有機音樂 series renders this connection more explicit, through both explicit frames and the use of natural, everyday and timeless sounds of water, paper, stones and ceramics. In *On Taoism*, rather than working towards a climax, Tan alternates kaleidoscopic monophonism, sonic clusters and weeping refrains that emerge out of and immerse into silences that function as what I will call *chaosmos* after James Joyce and *hundun* 渾沌 in Daoist terms.<sup>6</sup> According to early Daoism, the chaosmos 'sprouts' or 'gives birth to' 生 entities through intensity 气, spontaneity 自然, clustering 聚 and dispersal 散.<sup>7</sup> Like 'sprouting,' this chapter's title 'organizing music' suggests the pre-existence of and continued nourishing interaction with a milieu, rather than creation ex nihilo.



Illustration 5.1: Tan Dun on a poster announcing the performance of his *Organic Music* in MoMa, New York in 2005.

<sup>4</sup> The Tan's lived in Simaochong 思茅冲 (Changsha area), near burial grounds.

<sup>5</sup> Kouwenhoven 1991:17-18.

<sup>6</sup> Hall 1978:271, 274; Needham 1956:40-41, 50-52; Kim 2000:33.

<sup>7</sup> Hall 1978:271, 274.

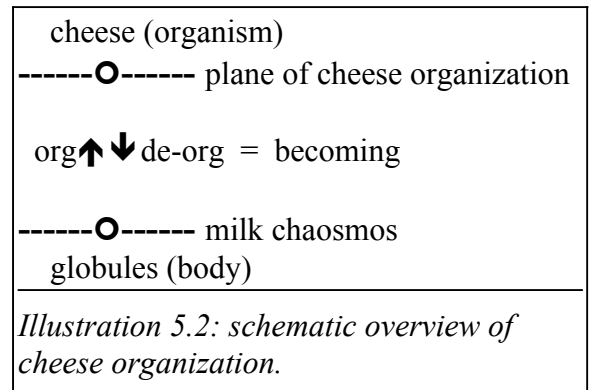
## Disparate Elements

The definition of music as organized sound goes back to the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century French-American composer Edgard Varèse.<sup>8</sup> Varèse related his works to physics, mathematics and biology, comparing composition to the erratic formation of crystals out of a relatively limited variety of internal structures:

There is an idea, the basis of an internal structure, expanded and split into different shapes or groups of sound constantly changing in shape, direction, and speed, attracted and repulsed by various forces. The form of the work is the consequence of this interaction. ... A composer, like all artists, is an organizer of disparate elements.<sup>9</sup>

Music as organized sound suggests the presence of directions or vectors in the sound matter that, once set to work, evolve of their own accord.<sup>10</sup> Deleuze and Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus* (1987) offers a vocabulary to describe these processes on an abstract yet detailed level. I will present their insights in a somewhat simplified form, using the metaphor of cheese production.

Our micro-chaosmos starts out with the emulsion of disparate elements we call milk. The milk also contains bacteria that convert milk sugar into lactic acid. As the milk turns sour, the first fragile curds spontaneously form. Enzymes such as rennet assist the curd's crystal-like growth, incorporating more and more of the surrounding elements into its organization. From the perspective of the cheese-to-be, growing means organizing milk globules into curd. The eventual form and taste of the cheese depend on the milieu in which it comes into existence (saltiness, sourness, microbes), as well as its successfulness in this milieu (size, cogency). The final product carries the milk globules of its creation along.



In reality, the coagulation of milk is irreversible. By contrast, in the more abstract theory of Deleuze and Guattari, “cheese” is only a temporary homeostasis. In terms of our necessarily limited metaphor, they argue that “cheese” relapses into milk continuously:

The [cheese] organism is not at all the body, [the milk globules]; rather, it is a stratum on [the milk globules], in other words, a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labor from the [milk globules], imposes upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences. ... A perpetual combat between the [milk chaosmos], which frees the [milk

<sup>8</sup> Based on Hoëne Wronsky's definition of music as “the corporealization of the intelligence that is in sound,” see Varèse 1966:17. On the next page he claims: “As far back as the twenties, I decided to call my music ‘organized sound’ and myself, not a musician, but a ‘worker in rhythms, frequencies and intensities.’”

<sup>9</sup> Varèse 1966:16, 18. Chou Wen-chung was born in 1923 in Shandong and emigrated to the United States in 1946, where he became one of Varèse's very few students. In 1972 Chou became a professor at Columbia University and in 1978 he established the United States-China Arts Exchange, which invited promising graduates of the then-recently reopened PRC conservatories. He invited Tan Dun in 1982, but Tan only arrived in New York in 1986, one year after finishing *On Taoism*. He lives there still in 2010. Cf. Utz 2002:264-270.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson 1991:33.

globules], cutting across and dismantling all of the strata, and surfaces of stratification that block it or make it recoil.<sup>11</sup>

In the larger and less sterile chaosmos of galaxies and ecologies, disparate elements are organized into entities in ways similar to cheese production. However, this is only one side of the creative process of becoming. Deleuze and Guattari draw attention to the equally creative transversal forces of deorganization, and to the messiness of open-ended adaptation, meaning mutations, symbioses and contagions.<sup>12</sup>

These combinations [in milieus and ecosystems] are neither genetic nor structural; they are interkingdoms, unnatural participations. That is the only way Nature operates—against itself.<sup>13</sup>

Making music differs from making cheese. Musical objects or events that may be likened to cheese are often less palpable and stable. Additionally, music works on different levels (or strata). Different things are involved in (and evolve through) making sounds, songs, and stars. Given these complexities, in a sense music is about these interstitial processes of becoming, the constant mutations between organizing and deorganizing.<sup>14</sup>

## §2 Reproducing Sounds

Tan Dun's *The Map: Saving Disappearing Music Traditions* 地圖：尋回消失中的根籟 (2003) performs the exploring, modeling and representing (in a word, the organizing) of the chaosmos more poignantly than *On Taoism*. Commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra and cellist Yo-Yo Ma, *The Map* is composed for cello solo and symphony orchestra, and uses audiovisual material of Hunan folk music that Tan previously recorded.<sup>15</sup> The DVD, recorded by Deutsche Grammophon in the exotic setting of the village of Fenghuang, opens with a speech of Tan Dun about sharing inspiration across nations, eras and environments. He then turns around to prepare to conduct. Concentration. Bird-like high dissonant notes on a reed flute (1' 45) introduce the string accompaniment (vibrato and accents) and a long drawn-out, melancholic solo on the cello (played by Anssi Karttunen). The first movement, Nuo (Ghost Dance & Cry Singing) 傩戲&哭唱, enters a phase of stronger contrasts in volume when winds and percussion gain ground, first intermittently with short violent bursts or sound clusters (4' 30), then with a syncopated rhythm and dissonant harmony to a steady three-beat pulse (4' 45). At 5' 17 the video screens flare up, showing a demonic black mask, and then a masked man dancing in a red apron with popular-Daoist *yin-yang* symbols. Harp arpeggio, and the orchestra plays to the trance-inducing pulse of the recorded percussion. The DVD runs an explanatory subtitle: "Nuo – In an ancient ritual, the Shaman welcomes and entertains troublesome ghosts, then casts them out." The cello plays a solo that fragments into lower registers.

<sup>11</sup> Deleuze 1987:159, modified.

<sup>12</sup> Deleuze 1987:10, 238 and 241 respectively.

<sup>13</sup> Deleuze 1987:242.

<sup>14</sup> Deleuze 1987:300.

<sup>15</sup> 'Music Traditions' in the English caption corresponds to *genlai* 根籟 in the Chinese title, but *genlai* is much richer in connotations. *Gen* means 'root' and refers to 1980s cultural trends known as *xungen* 尋根 'root-seeking'. *Lai* is a rare character that refers to an ancient wind instrument. Its most famous use is in the discussion of earthly, humanly and heavenly 'piping' in the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi*.

“He talks to stones, water and animals as if they were human spirits, thus connecting the next life with the past one.” Strings quickly glide from a high note down, inflecting the sound of the Chinese cymbals. Sounds cluster: the cello becomes a percussion instrument as it squeezes short phrases into the space left by the recorded and orchestral percussion, in a question-answer structure. The orchestra drowns out the video (8' 15). A small, syncopated rhythmic cell – an eighth and a sixteenth note – finally prevails in a repeated, large, consonant major chord (8' 28). Stravinsky-like stop and return to the dissonant, return of the reed flutes, a noncentric field with unidirectional sounds developing into a variant of the melancholic cello solo, and then into a short video citation of cry-singing (9' 26) accompanied by subtitles, cello and horns.

In the liner notes, Tan explains:

Metaphorically, the orchestra becomes nature, the soloist symbolizes people, and the video represents traditions ... The last section is made up of Movements 8 and 9, where the cello solo, orchestra and video become “one” and recreate music in its original, monophonic state: simple, like heartbeats. It is a finale that does not end.<sup>16</sup>

Movements 8 (38' 05) and 9 (40' 50) center around the ululating of tongue-singing and the harmonica-like jumps of the lusheng 蘆笙, a wind instrument made of several long bamboo pipes. Part of the virtuosity in these field recordings consists of fast alternation between a few notes, which can be heard as an elaborate type of vibrato. Another effect lies in the polyphony; both the tongue-singing and the lusheng playing are group performances. In Movement 8, the cello adds another layer to the female tongue-singers' almost canon-like performance. Through a number of accelerations that first outrun themselves, the finale of Movement 9 becomes a bombastic two-beat, with the accent on the two, as dictated by the slow, swaying dance of the male lusheng players on the screen (43' 00).

In the documentary *Discovering the Map*, which is included with the DVD, Tan remarks on the richness of local music traditions, saying that “sometimes the music composes me (9' 00).” Elsewhere, he has elaborated:

Many years ago a Buddhist monk from Hunan asked me: ‘Do you really make compositions 作曲? Or are the compositions making you?’ He even repeated it. Honestly, I didn’t get it. It took me over ten years to realize the value of his words. They convey that it is always the refraction of human consciousness that leads you into composing. [These refractions] are above your concepts. Of course this is also a kind of metaphysics, but you [simply] don’t know [whether] this is real 現實.<sup>17</sup>

We don’t know how much of this anecdote is real and how much of it Tan Dun invented to legitimize and promote his music.<sup>18</sup> That goes for *The Map* in general, whose very title resonates with colonialism, and whose dialogues between folksong and cello are framed by and feed into Western art music.<sup>19</sup> Tan’s beautiful scores for the internationally successful epic melodramas *Hidden Tiger, Crouching Dragon* 臥虎藏龍 (2000, d. Ang Lee) and *Hero* 英雄 (2002, d. Zhang Yimou) reveal a

<sup>16</sup> Tan 2004:10-11.

<sup>17</sup> Yue 2004:848, Cf. Zhang 2006a.

<sup>18</sup> Alison Friedman (one-time general manager of Tan Dun’s Parnassus Productions), conversation, September 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Young 2009.

similar amalgam of renewed pride in local traditions, the Chinese nation, and a religiously inspired escape from the nation's teleology, not so much into the chaosmos as into organized transcendence, which resonates with Western interests in zen and New-Age environmentalism.<sup>20</sup>

By contrast, I see organization and the chaosmos as immanent. There is nothing outside the milk.

## Xiao He's Live Loops

Deleuze and Guattari argue that “from chaos, *Milieus* and *Rhythms* are born,” and juxtapose differentiating rhythm to repetitive periodicity or meter: “there is nothing less rhythmic than a military march.”<sup>21</sup> Repetition has become increasingly important in Xiao He's music since 2005, partly due to renewed engagement with electronic equipment. In addition to spontaneity and originality, repetition and monotony have become part of Xiao He's negotiation of organization (curd) and deorganization (milk).

Xiao He's band Glorious Pharmacy recorded their first album *Please Enlarge My Cousin's Photograph* (2005) themselves, on a computer in their rehearsal space. GREEN-OLD WORMS 蒼老蟲 starts with the sound of marching boots, introducing a mock-military choir singing “one-two-one, one-two-one” to a three-quarter beat. Throughout the song, the musical protagonists, meaning Xiao He's voice and Li Tieqiao's saxophone, respond to the relatively unchanging chorus. Towards the end all the music suddenly stops, and Xiao He speaks fast, articulating lazily:

追了到我唱了(liao),其實我還不太 s-s-s 誰老等着, 出名不了, 錢也沒了, 打車的消費不夠好像, 你不知道錄這段, 整整錄了四百遍, 哎, 什麼旋律唱了四百遍, 還能唱得有感情。有感請

... chasing me up to where I'm singing. In fact I'm not so s-s-s... [*inaudible*] Whoever's always waiting, can't get famous, broke, no money to get home it seems... Did you know, we recorded this bit exactly 400 times, ay, is there a melody that after 400 times can still be sung with feeling? [*sings:*] With feeling...

Later in 2005, Xiao He contributed WE PASSED THE DIRECTOR 我們路過導演 to a folk music sampler published by Modern Sky called *Flower Village* 花园村. This song counts as Xiao He's first recording of experimental music. The intro consists of fast random shifts through various preset rhythms usually found in electronic keyboards. The actual song starts with rhythm chords on an acoustic guitar to which Xiao He recorded the same melody in 15 different preset sounds, until he finally sings, first “mi fa sol fa mi si do / la sol fa sol / si la sol la / mi sol fa mi” and then: “we passed the director and became criminals harboring demonic intentions 我們路過導演/就變成/心懷鬼胎/的罪犯.” The lyrics are timed lazily, with the sound bouncing back and forth from left to right, creating a heterophone effect.<sup>22</sup>

Whereas in GREEN-OLD WORMS the repetitive choir mainly serves as a dogmatic background or point of reference (challenged by the off-beat rhythmic accents of percussionist Guo Long and the elusive saxophone and lead vocals), in WE PASSED THE DIRECTOR repetition takes center stage. The performance does not construct irony, struggle or any other kind of interaction between the milieus of

<sup>20</sup> Shi 2006a.

<sup>21</sup> Deleuze 1987:313-314.

<sup>22</sup> Xiao He performed a different version of the song, which came out on DVD, at the Neo-folkfestival in 2005.

individual melody and societal harmony. Instead, it focuses on the repetition, and depletes the repeated elements of semantic and referential content. In the course of its repetition, the refrain disintegrates and deorganizes.<sup>23</sup>

In October 2006 I assisted Xiao He in purchasing a Boss RC-20 Loop Station in Hong Kong. This digital guitar effect allows him to record a musical phrase, loop it, play it in reverse, change speeds, add dubs and new phrases and thus create multilayered sound works single-handedly during live shows. In November 2007 Xiao He bought the Boss RC-50 Loop Station during a tour in Brussels. The RC-50 is an improved version of the RC-20, with stereo output and capacity for longer and more loops, enabling more complex structures than the accumulation of sounds towards cacophony. Starting in 2007, Xiao He would bring keyboards and a laptop to his solo live performances, and early in 2009 I purchased a Shadow SH-075 on his behalf because Xiao He could not find the device in China. The Shadow effectively transforms an acoustic guitar into a synthesizer by associating guitar notes to MIDI sounds.

The impact of this technology on Xiao He's negotiation between repetition and spontaneity is audible on his double album *The Performance of Identity* (2009). *One Man's Orchestra* 一個人的交響, the title of the second CD, refers to Xiao He's ability to build multi-layered sonic constructions during live shows, as well as his increasingly heavy equipment. Recorded between 2006 and 2008, this fairly representative selection of live recordings makes extensive use of loops. Xiao He usually brings his Loop Station with an empty memory, and, besides MIDI sounds, does not use pre-recorded samples. Additionally, his multi-layered sonic tapestries rarely stress a regular beat. They are heterophonic like Chinese instrumental folk music, or present untidy rhythmic and melodic modulations. On tracks such as SHUI18 and JING YANG, sound clusters slide past one another like geological strata, ice floes or milk globules.

The use of layers was typical for his live shows between 2006 and 2008. Xiao He usually performed several times a week, alternating acoustic songs with elaborate improvisations. He would also sometimes stop the guitar loops momentarily to sing-shout unaccompanied. His increasing interest in layers and multiplicities can be related to his theatricality (Chapter 4). A 2007 show in the Dashanzi art district in Beijing contained a song he built up out of layers of feedback from a megaphone, to which he added chainsaw sound samples, connecting the art space with physical labor. In 2008, when live shows slowly picked up again after the Beijing Olympics, Xiao He ended a Beijing



Illustration 5.3: Xiao He on a poster for a show in 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Deleuze 1994:293.

show in *Dos Kologas* with a song in which he first shouted and looped random numbers over a chaotic, tense musical underground. He suddenly stopped this increasingly frantic chaos and played a regular four-beat, over which he hysterically shouted “One! One! One!” referring to the official Olympics slogan “One World, One Dream” 同一個世界，同一個夢想.

### Sediments of Samsara

In their stress on liveness, Xiao He’s dialogues with his electronic devices can be compared to the inter-human cooperation in John Zorn’s game pieces, which also entail memory and repetition. The performer is never alone. Choices made by others elsewhere are already embedded in the instruments and techniques he or she uses, and thus, however indirectly, feed into the creative process. This is true for elaborate presets in state-of-the-art digital equipment as well as for acoustic instruments which carry entire traditions along.<sup>24</sup> In the experimental electronic music that Basile Zimmermann describes, Wang Fan (whom Zimmermann calls Lao Li) uses his Roland VS-880 Digital Studio Workstation to engage in a creative process that consists of four steps: (1) selecting samples or *sucai* 素材 ‘raw material’; (2) manipulating the material by changing its speed, reversing, splicing, and so on; (3) arranging and mixing a maximum of eight tracks of manipulated material into a single stereo track; (4) repetition (*reprise*) of the whole process, whereby the previously arranged stereo track, a “game” in Zimmermann’s words, can serve as raw material in its turn, or be stored for retrieval at a later stage. This four-step evolution continues until Wang Fan decides to stop. In the process, Wang Fan runs into versions of himself he can no longer alter independently of the stereo track, because all the sounds are “piled into one.”

As Middleton points out, repetition and rhythm have become even more defining for music since the Industrial Revolution:

Repetition ... grounds us in more than one sense. And nowhere more than in music, the art of iteration, whose multiple periodicities choreograph our every level of self-production, life and death. At the same time, it is a commonplace that, with the industrialization of culture, the mass reproduction of musical commodities takes the repetition process to another level.<sup>25</sup>

Paradoxically, to Wang Fan repetition is important conceptually as an antidote against mechanic numbness. He relates it to a Buddhist world view. *Meditation* 身體裡的冥想 (2001), for instance, performs a search for the unchanging in the chance elements of *samsara* 輪回 ‘the continuous flow of life and reincarnation.’<sup>26</sup> FM3’s *Buddha Machine* (2004) appeals to a similar coupling of repetition and meditation. The small box with a built-in speaker contains nine loops with ambient sounds that repeat until the batteries run out. It is modeled on devices used in Buddhist temples that play constant chants, and



Illustration 5.4: Cover of Wang Fan’s 2003 album *Endless Repetition* 無限反復.

<sup>24</sup> Zimmermann 2006:253-260. Théberge 1997, Jones 1995.

<sup>25</sup> Middleton 2006:137.

<sup>26</sup> Zimmermann 2006:129-140.

once Brian Eno was reported to have bought one it sold over ten thousand copies in 2005, which is a considerable number for this kind of music.<sup>27</sup>

### §3 Varying Songs

Zong Baihua was an influential Chinese esthetician in the turbulent first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The characteristics of the artistic conception 境界 displayed by Chinese painting are indeed rooted in the fundamental philosophy of the Chinese nation, namely the cosmology of *The Book of Changes*: the two *qi*'s of *yin* and *yang* transform-sprout 化生 all phenomena; the phenomena sprout because they are bestowed with the *qi* of heaven and earth; indeed, all objects are 'qi-accumulations' (Zhuangzi: Heaven is *qi* accumulated). This incessant sprouting of the *qi*'s of *yin* and *yang* knit into 組成 a kind of rhythmic life. 'Qi-resonating-sprouts-movement 气韵生动,' the *leitmotiv* of Chinese painting, means 'the rhythm of life' or 'rhythmic life.'<sup>28</sup>

Zong Baihua articulates 'organization' and 'rhythm' as characteristics of a tradition in which these concepts had hitherto received little explicit attention. Daoism was preoccupied with reversing the process of differentiation rather than with repetition per se. Confucianism incorporated periodicity in concepts such as *wen* 文 '(woven) pattern; writing, culture' and *li* 理 '(imprinted) texture; order, principle.' The (modern) Chinese word for 'organizing' is *zuzhi* 組織, combining characters that mean weaving and knitting.

Zong's conception of 'organization' and 'rhythm' links up with this Confucian discourse. The last of his three functions of esthetic form 美的形式 is inspiring people to approach truth and "the core of the rhythm of life." Moreover, rather than an inevitable fact of life, this is an ethical injunction. At the turbulent historical juncture of the 1920s and 1930s, Chinese estheticism's *raison d'être* lay in its claim of contributing to national progress. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, Zong's discourse of the order-pattern, or of *daoli* 道理, 'texture-of-Dao, rational truth,' amounts to organizing difference and rhythm by making it significant and expressive.<sup>29</sup>

In the cheese metaphor, expressiveness marks the consolidation of curd into cheese. During this process, liquid whey is drained from the curd by a combination of cutting, heating, stretching, folding, salting and pressing. Therefore, the notion of expression here involves the physical labor of pressing. Rather than to the intention of an individual author, it should be related to the articulation of hard cultural forms (see Chapter 2). Deleuze and Guattari describe the relation of formative coagulation and expressive consolidation in the following terms:

[The coagulation] chooses or deducts, from unstable particle-flows, metastable [heterogeneous] molecular or quasi-molecular units (*substances*) upon which it imposes a statistical order of connections and successions (*forms*). [The consolidation] establishes functional, compact, stable structures (*forms*), and constructs the [homogeneous, crystal-like] molar compounds in which these structures are simultaneously actualized (*substances*). In a geo-

<sup>27</sup> Park 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Zong 1996:108. Cf. Wang 1997:55.

<sup>29</sup> Deleuze 1987:315.

logical stratum, for example, [the coagulation] is the process of ‘sedimentation,’ which deposits units of cyclic sediment according to a statistical order: flysch, with its succession of sandstone and schist. [The consolidation] is the ‘folding’ that sets up a stable functional structure and effects the passage from sediment to sedimentary rock.<sup>30</sup>

This double process of coagulation and consolidation shows similarities to Wang Fan’s creative process, with the coagulation of content in the selection, manipulation and arrangement of samples and the folding of expression in the piles of sound that result from repeating the procedures. The coagulation-consolidation model and the algorithm of evolution are not incompatible. In its focus on becoming, the process of coagulation-consolidation also describes the morphogenesis of “functional, compact, stable structures.”<sup>31</sup>

Now that the cheese is recognizable as such and its organization is defined, it has become an identifiable entity, something we can categorize, brand, transport, sell and so on. In other words, the cheese can now circulate and function in a larger environment or economy. ‘Expression’ thus also refers to the significance and identity the cheese gains through the process of pressing and folding.

In music, refrains can create relatively stable and expressive organized forms in a way similar to the consolidation of cheese. The best example is how bird songs cease to be meaningless sounds and become expressive by delineating a territory. However, music also has a strong potential for disrupting and deorganizing, for threatening expressiveness. Music produces clearly defined songs, artists and communities, but it may also pull sound (and by extension the connections they articulate) back towards chaosmos, for instance when melodies cease being recognizable because they are ubiquitous, deliberately distorted or lost in the cacophony of mash-ups or rock endings. Sometimes music de-coagulates back into the milk, but music’s disruptive power may also open new possibilities (reorganization). For cheese this might happen through heating (fondue), fermentation or mere ripening. In the following pages, I will show how the relatively stable entities of melodies and songs propagate in myriad variations, freeing up energies, sounds and capital that can then transform or recombine in larger and more complex constellations.<sup>32</sup>

## The Evolution of Labeled Melodies

In her study of the nostalgic Japanese pop genre *enka*, Christine R. Yano introduces the notion of *kata*, which she translates as “patterning; patterned form.”<sup>33</sup> She explains that *kata* should not be seen as false form opposed to original content, or as a formulaic straitjacket opposed to individual emotion and expression. The surface esthetic, attention to detail, performativity, codification, historical significance, and transcendence that define her notion of *kata* finally also include its negation, since singers perfect their *kata* to the point where they vanish.<sup>34</sup> In her analysis of the performance of *enka*, Yano distinguishes *kata* of words (tropes), music (compositional formats and standardized styles of vocal delivery) and bodies (clichéd posture and dress).

<sup>30</sup> Deleuze 1987:40, 41, modified.

<sup>31</sup> Buskes 2006. Simon Frith defines music as “an ordered pattern of sounds in the midst of a vast range of more or less disorderly aurality” (Frith 1996:102), and Jacques Attali’s seminal book *Noise* is based on the conception of music as “giving form to noise in accordance with changing syntactic structure” (Attali 1985:10).

<sup>32</sup> Deleuze 1987:41, 315, 300.

<sup>33</sup> *Kata* is closely related to *katachi*. Both correspond to 形 ‘form’ and 型 ‘model’ in kanji.

<sup>34</sup> Yano 2002:26.

Although the term is not used in this way in Chinese discourse, I submit that *kata* play an important role in Chinese traditional music. All Chinese traditional music is said to go back to a structure and melody called ‘eight beats’ *baban* 八板. Scholars usually divide the Chinese folk music they encounter nowadays into two basic and interrelated systems according to what I see as musical *kata*: composition by stringing together *qupai* 曲牌, ‘labeled’ or ‘fixed’ melodies, and by combining metric type and generalized melody or mode, referred to as *banqiang* 板腔, ‘beat-tune.’ Labeled melodies consist of 20 to 70 measures of 2/4 in their skeletal, unadorned, versions, some of which can be found in a bewildering number of variations across regions and music genres.<sup>35</sup> Kunqu Opera counts as a climax of composition by stringing labeled melodies, and arranges even larger complexes of pre-established sequences of melodies, known as *taoqu* 套曲, ‘melody-sets.’

In this respect, Kunqu is often contrasted with Peking Opera, which replaced it as the dominant national opera style in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and employs a *banqiang* compositional style. The *banqiang* system is characterized by the use of a few rudimentary melodies or tunes (*qiang*), perhaps better understood as modes or modal systems, that primarily diversify through combination with set metric forms (*ban*). Hence, this compositional *kata* is sometimes referred to as “the system of variation through (woodblock) beats” 板式變化體. The specification of metric forms and modes and thus the development towards *banqiang* systems is a general trend in Chinese operatic musics.<sup>36</sup>

However, Peking Opera also employs labeled melodies. For instance, the Kunqu labeled melody THE WIND BLOWS THE LOTUS LEAVES TO A HALT 風吹荷葉煞, from the opera *Longing for Secular Life* 思凡, provides both the label and the melody of Peking Opera’s DEPTH OF THE NIGHT 夜深沉. The newer variant, extended from 20 measures to 107, is used in a range of contexts not implied in the original use, for instance during Concubine Yu’s sword dance in *Farewell My Concubine* (see Chapter 3). Subsequently, players of the jinghu (京胡, the principal spike fiddle of Peking Opera) have recorded instrumental versions that reveal their virtuosity, propelling the melody into other genres.

Additionally, Peking Opera has inherited Kunqu’s system of composition by selection of *kata*:

Musical composition for Peking opera plays is often called *buju* [布局], which literally means “arrangement of the parts.” The composition process is perceived as occurring in three sequential stages. In the first stage, modal systems and modes are selected and arranged for the entire play; in the second, metrical types are selected and arranged for passages of lyrics. Certain standard compositional patterns (*guilü* [規律]) are usually followed in these first two steps. In the third stage, individual melodic-passages are interpretively composed.<sup>37</sup>

Musical *kata* such as labeled melodies and modal systems also function as convenient formats for librettists to compose their words in. In fact, ‘labeled melody’ and ‘labeled lyric’ 詞牌 have often been used synonymously, and the processes of ‘fitting’ or ‘filling in’ lyrics or *tianci* 填詞 in poetry, opera and pop music share many features.<sup>38</sup> In Cantonese opera, the scriptwriter first arranges a se-

<sup>35</sup> Jones 1995:130.

<sup>36</sup> Zhang 1993.

<sup>37</sup> Wichman 1991:131.

<sup>38</sup> Qiao 1998, Feng 2004.

quence of scenes to which he selects fitting types of speech, music and percussion patterns, and only then ‘fills in’ the lyrics.<sup>39</sup> This process of selection, as Yung and other authors argue, is creative, because the ‘repeated’ melodies, modes and words need to be translated to the locality of the narrative context in the script, the role-type, the performer, the instrumentation and the local dialect.<sup>40</sup> Next to music-language-narrative interactions, strategies of translation into local milieus also consist of the cooptation of local folksongs to the labeled-melody system, deliberate changes of tempo which require the addition or deletion of ornaments (expansion and contraction), and the recombination of sentences from different labeled melodies into a so-called *jiqu* 集曲, a ‘gather-song, i.e. a musical medley with a new, unifying text.’<sup>41</sup>

Every single performance is a generation in the genealogy of these melodies. *Kata* continuously coagulate and decoagulate in and out of the milk, so to speak, and fold and unfold into and out of solid cheese, through processes of repetition and differentiation. As such, *kata* such as *qupai* can be understood as memes. Memes are the cultural analogue to genes in biology: “the smallest elements that replicate themselves with reliability and fecundity.”<sup>42</sup> Memetics and related theories present cultural and linguistic forms as having a history and development that are positively alive and possibly antagonistic to their hosts (human brain tissue) – hence, the trope of language as a parasite.<sup>43</sup> The success of musical formulas, such as labeled melodies, depends on their memorability, their ability to stick to and spread through the human brain, and their transmission over vast areas and time spans has often been noted. However, a labeled melody is much longer than the few notes or chords that Steven Jan identifies as a musical meme in his *Replicating Sonorities: Towards a Memetics of Music* (2000), and is perhaps better understood as a memplex – a complex of memes that are mutually beneficent or logically related and therefore procreate as groups.

The Northeastern Chinese theatrical genre Two-Taking-Turns belongs to the labeled melody system. A relative latecomer with its two-hundred-year history, its melodies are borrowed from folksongs and older genres, but recently also from popular music and disco. In the broad sense, Two-Taking-Turns performances are variety shows that contain solo theater (單出頭), solo song (小帽) and multiplayer pieces with fixed roles (拉場戲), next to the characteristic duet of a male clown and a female role-type (*dan*). These latter performances consist of ten to twenty labeled melodies divided in opening, character introduction, dramatic development and reprise. Not all melodies are equally suitable for all parts of a Two-Taking-Turns play in this narrow sense. HUHU MODE 胡胡腔, for instance, is habitually used to accompany the dance and acrobatics that open a piece, and its importance has led to a proliferation of variants, moving the melody in the direction of a mode, for instance through combination with folksongs, the elaboration of different elements of the melody and through coupling with metric types (*ban*). Another example of part-specification is that of CIVIL HAIHAI 文嗨嗨 and MARTIAL HAIHAI 武嗨嗨 melodies. Especially the latter is common, and because its monotone and repetitive nature does not distract from the lyrics it often makes up the bulk of the music of pieces that revolve around language.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Yung 1989:43,136; Chan 1991:89.

<sup>40</sup> For a more elaborate description, see He 1985:255-312.

<sup>41</sup> Yung 1989:155.

<sup>42</sup> Jan 2007, quoting Dennet.

<sup>43</sup> Dennet 1999:8.

<sup>44</sup> Zhai 2007; 2007a.

## Recombining in Medleys

We take the elevator down from the studio located on the 24<sup>th</sup> floor near the Northern fourth ring road in Beijing. “We can use this studio for free at night, because the studio engineer is a buddy of my arranger,” explains Liu Juanjuan, who leads a small music company. Her arranger had been happy to interrupt the recording session of a troublesome guitar solo to show us the expensive equipment of the studio. “We’ve been so successful because we work like a team,” Juanjuan explains, referring to the arranger and writer of the song, with whom she also shares a small apartment. It’s November 2007. As we walk off into the night she asks me what I think of the song they were recording. “It has a familiar ring to it. Who’s the singer?” “Oh, just a friend, we’ll rerecord the vocals in the end. No wonder it sounds familiar though, we usually check the ten most popular songs online, select and rearrange some suitable elements, make a few changes to avoid overt plagiarism and smooth out the wrinkles.” I am surprised to hear this from an ex-employee of an underground rock bar. She responds to my frown: “These guys play the music they really like in their own bands, but as a company we have to think of customer demand.” We wait by the side of the ring road, as taxis are hard to come by around here at this hour. “You should see how I’ll stir-fry 炒 [i.e. make hot, hype] this next song,” she boasts as she finally gets into her cab, “the singer is a good friend of the dean of a high school, so they were able to invest a lot of money for us to plug it. You’ll feel the hype on your trip to Shanghai and Hong Kong.”

The strategy I found so surprising seems to be widely known. For instance, in 2005 Zhao Jian created a minor stir by posting the song *SHOCK2005 刺激 2005* on the Internet. *SHOCK 2005* is a medley 串燒 containing the melody, lyrics and even the exact delivery of individual lines from 23 recent hit songs. In a typical Northeastern Chinese style, Zhao Jian – who posted the song under a pseudonym borrowed from a Zhao Benshan role – attempts to ridicule and “shock” the formulaic nature of Chinese popular music.<sup>45</sup> However, the song is also popular because of its pleasant and recognizable sound. It seems it has only left audiences more cynical, accepting covert and overt citation as to be expected in the struggle of companies, artists and melodies for attention and revenue.

Although Zhao Jian and most specialists downplay the song’s creative contribution, its craft lies in the selection of the phrases, each of which is instantaneously reminiscent of the original, and the structure that creates a logical sequence of lyric and melodic content.<sup>46</sup> The ascending melody enhances the drama of heartbreak, and the pattern of endlessly repeating the chorus truthfully mimics clichéd pop ballads.

## Translating

The recombinatory technique Liu Juanjuan describes and Zhao Jian ridicules can be seen as instances of ‘grabbism’ 拿来主义, a term famously coined by Lu Xun in 1933. Lu Xun pits grabbism against China’s traditional isolationism, the modern ‘giveaway-ism’ of Chinese art to the West, and to the reception of the paralyzing gifts of Western cultural and agrarian overproduction. According to Lu Xun:

<sup>45</sup> Nanjing Chenbao 2005.

<sup>46</sup> He 2005.

[a grabbist] occupies 占有 and selects 挑选. ... this person should be profound, vigorous, discerning and unselfish. Without grabbism, people cannot become New People [i.e. modern citizens]. Without grabbing, the arts cannot become New Arts.<sup>47</sup>

However frequently and aptly grabbism is mobilized and used in sinophone debates on originality, Lu Xun's ethical agenda complicates its use in our current situation. His distinction renders the re-arrangement of popular melodies positively as active and progressive appropriation, or negatively as passive and reactionary submission to cultural overproduction. Still, grabbism offers the possibility of regarding selective reuse as a viable creative strategy, and as such can be connected to the reevaluation of the relation between original and copy in Western theory of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The locus classicus here is Walter Benjamin's *The Task of the Translator* (*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*), written in 1921, some ten years before Lu Xun's text. Strikingly, Benjamin claims art to be alive, "an idea to be apprehended with entirely unmetaphorical matter-of-factness."<sup>48</sup> To Benjamin, an artwork's vitality is proven by its traceable history of antecedents, formation and its potentially perpetual living-on (*Fortleben*). Benjamin also consistently disavows meaning:

Attaining [to a higher and purer linguistic air] is not with root and branch, but in it resides that which makes a translation more than sharing information (*Mitteilung*). More precisely the actual nucleus (*wesenhafte Kern*) can be defined as that in [a translation] which is not re-translatable. Namely, if one would distill its information as much as one could and translate that, then still that which is untouchable and on which the labor of the true translator is focused remains behind (*bleibt zurück*). It is not transferable like the words of the original are, because the relationship between content and language is different in original and translation. Namely, where in the former they construct a certain unity like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content (*Gehalt*) like a royal robe with ample folds. ...

What seeks to present, indeed to re-present itself in the becoming (*Werden*) of language, is this nucleus of pure language itself.<sup>49</sup>

The nucleus of pure language is not paraphrasable semantic content, but that which is untranslatable and untouchable.<sup>50</sup> As Homi Bhabha writes, referring to Benjamin, Derrida, Salman Rushdie and Paul de Man:

it is the dream of translation as 'survival' as Derrida translates the 'time' of Benjamin's concept of the afterlife [*Überleben*] of translation, as *sur-vivre*, act of living on borderlines. ... For the migrant's survival depends ... on discovering 'how newness enters the world'. The focus is on making the linkages through the unstable elements of literature and life – the dangerous tryst with the 'untranslatable' ... I am less interested in the metonymic fragmentation of the 'original.' I am more engaged with the 'foreign' element that reveals the intersti-

<sup>47</sup> Lu Xun 1981.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin 1968:11.

<sup>49</sup> Benjamin 1968:76 (translation modified on the basis of Benjamin 1972:15) and Benjamin 1972:19.

<sup>50</sup> Derrida 1985:193, Cf. Derrida 1979.

tial; insists in the textile superfluidity of folds and wrinkles; and becomes the ‘unstable element of linkage,’ the indeterminable temporality of the in-between.’<sup>51</sup>

Firstly, this quotation makes explicit that this theoretical problem of European high literature and philosophy is also recognizable in the global flows of culture and power. In colonial and postcolonial settings, concepts such as (cultural) translation gain in political momentum. Significantly the (unilateral) marriage of cultures here results not in purification, but in hybridization, a term derived from biology.<sup>52</sup> In this sense the folds also suggest something of the violence that cultural translation brings along with it.<sup>53</sup>

Secondly, whereas Benjamin juxtaposes “the eternal life of works” to the provisional nature of translations, Bhabha chooses to ignore the dreams of eternity and purity, concentrating on and in effect isolating a flux.<sup>54</sup> In such a temporary movement or performance, translation becomes increasingly open-ended, and susceptible to divergence and convergence from explicit and implicit inspirational sources.

Finally, wrinkles and folds take us back to Deleuze: they offer a way of thinking that reconciles the essential superficiality of *kata* and the depth of expressiveness. Similar to Benjamin, Deleuze and Guattari discredit translation as the transmission of messages, arguing instead that it establishes a surplus value, enabling creativity and deorganizing.<sup>55</sup>

## Unfolding a Second Hand Rose

The songs of Second Hand Rose typically consist of discernible chunks that follow each other with sudden transitions, or without transitions at all. This compositional *kata* is reminiscent of both the stringing of labeled melodies in Two-Taking-Turns and the highly standardized verse-chorus structures of pop music. Next to recombining compositional strategies, Second Hand Rose also ‘grab’ sounds, melodies and sometimes entire passages from other music, from various Chinese and Western traditions. Indeed, part of the power of Second Hand Rose’s music lies in the juxtaposition and superposition of clichéd sounds: recognizable, but not quite the same.

REVELATIONS OF A QUEST FOR MARRIAGE 徵婚啓示 on *Second Hand Rose* (2003), for instance, starts with a percussion intro played with clappers and a traditional drum. The changing accents and additional notes of the three-quarter or ‘one-beat-two-eyes’ structure instantly evoke Chinese traditional music, specifically the storytelling genre of *kuaiban* 快板, ‘fast boards’ (performed by traditional percussionist Tian Dongjun). The 32 counts of the intro end with a Chinese cymbal on the last quarter that introduces the voice for the first verse. The beat now changes to the regular duple meter, typical of Chinese storytelling. Liang Long’s ten-odd character sentences start on the second eighth note and end with short fillers – drawn, nasal “aah’s” – to which the percussion reacts with ornaments (*hua* 花) on toms and cymbals that spill into the next measure. Hence, similar to Two-Taking-Turns, the transition between the end of a phrase and the beginning of the next is musically

<sup>51</sup> Bhabha 1994:324-326.

<sup>52</sup> On this term, Cf. Canclini 1995.

<sup>53</sup> Rey Chow 1995:185, 200. See also De Kloet 2008, who prefers the medico-chemical term ‘contamination.’

<sup>54</sup> This is a direct example of the creativity of translation: flux is a translation of both *stetem Wandel* ‘constant meandering’ and *Sprachbewegung* ‘movement of speech’ in the original. Something similar happens with ‘active force in life’ which is central to Rey Chow’s reading: its appearance in the authoritative translation can only correspond to the adjunct *gegenwärtig im Leben* ‘(as) present in life’ in the original.

<sup>55</sup> Deleuze 1987:62, 136-137.

most elaborate (between beat 4 and 1 in the example), while the beats in the middle remain unadorned to render the lyrics comprehensible.

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| ◦ 那天我心情啊實在不高興啊 | That day I was really in a bad mood.                     |
| ◦ 找了個大仙 我算了一卦  | I found a fortune-teller, laid out my cards.             |
| ◦ 他說我婚姻只有三年的長呀 | He said my marriage would last only three years.         |
| ◦ 我那顆愛她的心有點慌啊  | This heart of mine that loved her so was a bit confused. |

Typical of Chinese opera, every two sentences form a pair: the first (*shangju* 上句) is finished high, and the second on a lower note.<sup>56</sup> In this case, each sentence contains two rhythmic and semantic units (*dou* 逗), each consisting of five full characters and separated by a short caesura, a filler or accentuation. At the same time, the syncopation of the vocal melody in combination with the playful bass line that joins in the second verse create a rhythmic and harmonic development that contributes to the expectation of change after sixteen quadruple measures, more typical of blues-derived structures.

The typical rock sound of a distorted guitar, drums and bass dominate the ensuing first chorus. The order is reversed: first one measure with an ascending scale on guitar, then one in which the vocals comment on the question mark of the guitar riff, each of the four times with increasingly intense slogan-like outcries. The chorus is abruptly followed by a first bridge in which a hesitant and scattered guitar and drawn-out chords on a horse-headed two-string fiddle contrast with the busy drums. The guitar's distant reference to musical clichés typically used in Westerns and the hoarse fiddle Mongolian provenance bring to mind a desolate plain traversed by the repetitive rhythm of a bustling caravan. The bridge temporarily dissolves some of the tension of the chorus. After eight measures the band stops, and only a dubbed fiddle continues to sound for another two measures. With a drum fill we enter the third verse, which is now accompanied not by the Chinese storytelling instrumentation of the first verse, but by a full rock sound: standard four-beat, the bass line nearly subdued by an equally playful guitar line. Then comes second chorus, identical to the first but now with the last line of the verse's lyrics repeated and thus isolated, ending in an affirmative "I really am pregnant!" A second bridge immediately follows the chorus: it seems to have been adapted from the outro of *FUNKY MONKS*, a track from the international mega-hit *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* (1991) by the Californian funk band Red Hot Chili Peppers. The entire passage has successfully propagated itself into *REVELATIONS OF A QUEST FOR MARRIAGE*, where, just like in the original, it functions as a repetitive, soothing background – but it is also coupled to a witty dialogue, which Liang Long says was inspired by a *duanzi* or 'script' of Two-Taking-Turns, with the "worn-out shoe" denoting sexual promiscuity:<sup>57</sup>

哎那天我看見那誰那誰搞破鞋  
哪個?就東北那個?  
讓我給堵著了  
真的?

Wang: The other day I met what's her name, that worn-out shoe.  
Liang: Which one? That Northerner?  
Wang: She blocked my path.  
Liang: Really?

<sup>56</sup> Wichmann 1991:33.

<sup>57</sup> Fenghua 2003. The interview mentions Wang Xiaoli 王小麗 as the source. Online discussion forums spell the final character as *li* 利, saying it comes from a piece called *A Shrew Scolding in the Street* 泼妇骂大街, but that piece is by Wang Xiaoli 王小力.

哎呀跟一個男的連摟帶啃的  
 不能不能不能  
 他一家人都那味,他哥也那味  
 他哥不當官的嗎?  
 就是因為這事下去的嗎,  
 (是嗎是嗎是嗎)  
 他妹妹也是,一年跟好幾個呀.  
 是嗎? 連他還不如,  
 他妹妹是個甚麼東西啊  
 (真的真的真的)  
 一開始是個畫畫的,  
 後來不是搞音樂的嗎,二手玫瑰  
 (是嗎是嗎是嗎)  
 那按你那麼說,  
 那二手玫瑰可不算搞破鞋咋的  
 那可不是咋的  
 (真的真的真的)  
 臭不要臉的!

沒啥事你講究我干啥呀!  
 (是嗎是嗎是嗎)  
 我他嗎搞破鞋,啊你不搞啊你?  
 (真的真的真的)  
 不但你搞, 你二嫂也搞...  
 (是嗎是嗎是嗎)  
 那是他跟的, 那是我的鐵子

Wang: She was embracing a man, they were eating each other up!  
 Liang: No way, no way.  
 Wang: Her whole family's like that, her brother too.  
 Liang: Wasn't her brother an official?  
 Wang: He stepped down because of it.  
 (Choir: Oh yeah? Oh yeah? Oh yeah?)  
 His sister's like that too, changes lots of them in a year.  
 Liang: Oh yeah? His sister seems to be worse than him,  
 what kind of monster is she?  
 (Choir: Really? Really? Really?)  
 Wang: It started with a painter.  
 Didn't she get into those musicians, Second Hand Rose?  
 (Choir: Oh yeah? Oh yeah? Oh yeah?)  
 Wang: According to what you say,  
 Second Hand Rose isn't a worn-out shoe or anything  
 Wang and Liang: No, that'd be impossible.  
 (Choir: Really? Really? Really?)  
 Liang [*now in falsetto, assuming the role of the accused*]:  
 You shameless crocks!  
 Nothing's going on, what are you staring at me for!  
 (Choir: Oh yeah? Oh yeah? Oh yeah?)  
 You call me a worn-out shoe, and you're not doing anyone?  
 (Choir: Really? Really? Really?)  
 You're doing it, and your brother's wife's doing it too...  
 (Choir: Oh yeah? Oh yeah? Oh yeah?)  
 That's him taking after me, that's my resolution.

The increasing agitation of the bridge leads immediately into the third chorus, a copy of the first. The last sentence, "I destroy this artist you are," leads to a shortened coda ending in a typically noisy rock cacophony – a tradition most likely developed out of the climactic grand finale of Western opera. The structure disintegrates for a number of measures, then the tempo drops and Liang Long sings the outro. The accompaniment by a single bass drone refers back to the horse-headed fiddle and performs static timelessness. This cyclic-yet-static time is linked to the traditional feel of the first verse. Additionally, the lyrics embody a retrospective morale and a prospective promise:

誰害怕貧窮誰害怕富有啊  
 誰會天長啊誰不會地久  
 如果你恨你就恨出個追求  
 如果你愛我我會一絲不...

Who fears poverty, who fears wealth,  
 who'll be as enduring as the universe,  
 who'll not outlast the world?  
 If you're spiteful, your spite will lead to a [restless] chase.  
 If you love me, I will strip off all my...

The last sentence slows down and a single Chinese cymbal clash replaces the last character.

The structure of REVELATIONS OF A QUEST FOR MARRIAGE – intro, verse<sub>1</sub>, verse<sub>2</sub>, chorus<sub>1</sub>, bridge<sub>1</sub>, verse<sub>3</sub>, chorus<sub>2</sub>, bridge<sub>2</sub>, chorus<sub>3</sub>, verse<sub>4</sub> – is not uncommon in pop and rock music, while it is also congruent with Chinese stage traditions such as Two-Taking-Turns. That Second Hand Rose quotes from specific Western and Chinese sources reveals that cross-breeding and recombination are important compositional *kata*.

## Rearranging Flowers

A sudden burst of activity spreads through the late afternoon heat in the Dong Music office when Zhang Yadong finally arrives in his small record company. Zheng Wei asks Zhang what he thinks of his rearrangement of the song FLOWER 花兒, and they listen to a MIDI demo together with two or three other people who happen to be in the room. Zheng Wei, who graduated from the Shanghai Conservatory, can't help showing disappointment when it becomes clear that a final version will still take some effort. "It sounds too Western 洋," says Zhang, "and it should be less polished. Find a guitar player who's kind of second-rate 比较二." Without vocals, a melodic phrase on the flute takes center stage in the chorus. The beat breaks with a strong accent on the first eighth note of every other measure. "It needs more flow." "You mean the accent...?" asks the arranger. "Yeah," says Zhang, as he marks the pulse by slapping the palm of one hand with the other. Raising his voice, he asks the employee whose computer we are using: "Do you know that song by Dido, with the guitar intro?" The employee surfs to a website where the songs of the British female singer are available in live stream, most likely illegal. "Not this song," says Zhang as he bends over to the computer, "try the next one." As the soothing tones of the song enter the room, Zhang Yadong shakes his head to the inconspicuous four-beat, and Zheng Wei responds by nodding in vague agreement. We listen to another one of Dido's songs. Zhang: "This is too fast, but it's the feeling of the guitar, d'you understand?" "Are we going to record it with real drums or use MIDI?" asks Zheng Wei. Zhang replies evasively: "Yeah, guitar, flute, and then the drums, like that."

Later that day I hear the song again, but now a female voice hums along with the melody. Zhang Yadong introduces her as the singer Ye Pei and shows her around his company. They take the stairs down to the Jet Studio, where Zhang and his studio personnel record the artists he has signed to Dong Music, as well as some of the projects he acquires through his job as production supervisor at the major Chinese record company Taihe Rye and his general network. FLOWER is not a composition of Zhang Yadong, but a cover of a song by Ma Tiao, most likely selected by Ye Pei herself. Years ago, Ma Tiao contributed a number of songs to Taihe Rye Music, including one on Ye Pei's debut album *The Age of Innocence* 纯真年代 (1998), and he briefly worked for them again in 2004. Ma Tiao was born in Xinjiang Province, and many of his songs have a central Asian flavor. Zhang Yadong and Ye Pei's version stresses the folk feeling in the song but dispenses with Ma Tiao's coarse vocal delivery and rock instrumentation. These changes stress that this is a polished studio production rather than an 'authentic' live performance in a small pub, which is what Ma Tiao's recording of 2007 sounds like. Ye Pei's voice sounds electric and cos-

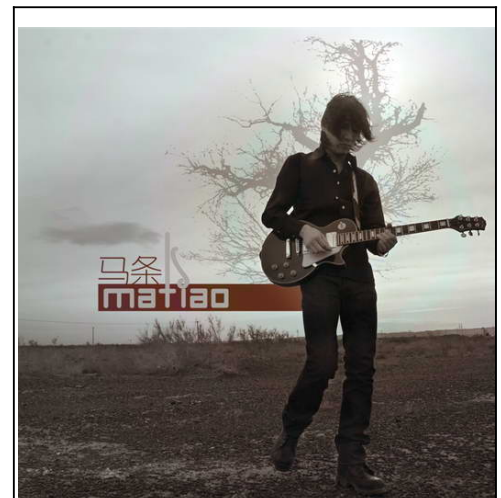


Illustration 5.5: Ma Tiao on the cover of his eponymous album (2007).

mopolitan through a light Cher effect. Nevertheless, Zhang Yadong notably elaborates on the folk sound through sampled folk ‘yodeling’ and playful winds performed by Xiao Bu Dian, a member of Ma Tiao’s live band. This attention to Chinese folk music elements is remarkable given the explanation Zhang offered for declining to produce the second album of Second Hand Rose: “I am more suitable for introducing Western sounds in China than the other way around.”<sup>58</sup>

The list of sounds and people participating in the song FLOWER is endless, and the amount and importance of the input of these people varies greatly. Focusing on the mechanisms of transformation, in these adaptations not only the copyrighted original, but an abundance of instruments, traditions, songs, sounds and sound effects reassert themselves. Some, but not all, of these conscious and unconscious citations are ‘deciphered’ by audiences with great accuracy, adding to a more or less coherent identity of song, album and singer. The rationale that provides coherence to the artistic choices on Ye Pei’s *I Want My Freedom* 我要的自由 (2008) can be enunciated using a single concept:

[the opening songs] FLOWER is the unbridling of nature, LET ME LOOK AT YOU 让我看着你 is attentive freedom, EXQUISITE OXYGEN--DEEP BREATH 悠氧·深呼吸 [composed by Zhang Yadong] is tranquil freedom... every song is a different shade of the state of freedom. Freedoms required for every time and and place can find a suitable place on this album ... “I hope that listening to this album will let you become relaxed, lay down your burden, experience happiness, evaluate your position in life and become your own true master,” this is what Ye Pei wanted to express with this album from the very beginning.<sup>59</sup>

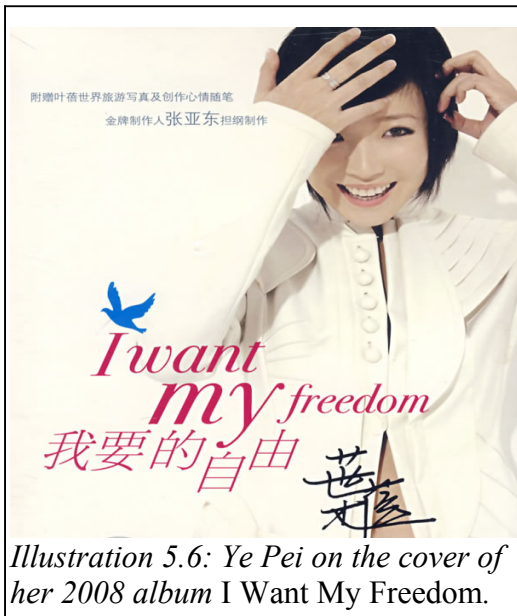


Illustration 5.6: Ye Pei on the cover of her 2008 album *I Want My Freedom*.

This proliferation and evolution of entire memeplexes of labeled melodies, folksongs and pop adaptations are only the more readily discernible formations in the strata of musical organization. Next to these species of songs, the recombinatory techniques of sampling and grabbing described earlier constitute additional frames for popular music, partly accounting for its conservatism, especially when investors demand songs that resemble the latest hit.<sup>60</sup> Adaptation, citation, concept and reference are all strategies of consolidation that direct and create songs, albums and artists.

## Laying out Concepts

Lyricists usually get not only a rough demo of the song, but also a file on the singer containing concepts and images the record company plans to have associated with the star or star-to-be.<sup>61</sup> The making of many albums begins with relatively general and abstract concepts, often pertaining to an

<sup>58</sup> Zhang Yadong, conversation, October 2007.

<sup>59</sup> Anonymous 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Li Ronghao, conversation, September 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Chow Yiufai, conversation, May 2007.

understanding of market demand and decisions concerning the direction an artist should take. Wind Music is a Taiwanese record company that specializes in New Age music and easy listening, a market pioneered by the Canadian composer Matthew Lien. Originally a publisher, Wind Music realized there was potential in producing music. Their catalog is divided not according to artist, but primarily in series of albums with a common instrument, theme or sound. As producer Judy Wu explained, an album starts with deciding on a concept, for instance one or more places in Taiwan, a particular species of birds, or different times of the day in the forest. In this last case they made field recording of forest sounds and sent these to the composers.<sup>62</sup> But Dong Yun-chang, who has frequently composed for Wind Music since 2001, explained that the concepts and field sounds weren't very useful to him. When I asked him how he translates the concepts into music, Dong replied:

They usually send a number of samples too. Two or three tracks of how they want the result to sound. And they say something about the tempo: cheerful and fast, melancholic, and so on. I listen to the examples superficially; listening too hard would compromise my creativity. Then I decide on the key and start trying some things on the chromatic scale. I create a chord progression and later a melody line, and then I sometimes adjust the chords to fit the melody better. Then I send Wind Music a first section (A 段). If it's what they like, I continue to elaborate; if not, I make changes according to their suggestions.

In fact, Wind Music's strategy is very simple. They opt for long-term cooperation with their composers. The first time they might commission you to write five songs, and let's say that 50% of your work needs to be amended. Next time they give you two songs, and you get 70% right the first try. That way you develop a relationship, and you get more and more commissions. If you don't deliver, the workload declines. Now, what do they want? Rule 1: no jazz. Rule 2: make sure that you are in the triangle of Chinese style, Asian style and World Music, and perhaps a hint of pop music. In other words: 70% musical elements from the yellow race, 20% Western musical elements and 10% other musical influences. These other elements cannot contain black music, at the very most a little bit of Latin. I have used samba and bossa nova in the past, but obviously in watered-down versions. ...

Wind Music is not to blame. It's not their choice really. Their strategy is the result of their understanding of the Taiwanese market, based on years of selling World Music. Their music cannot be too pure because they can never compete with true folk musicians. It has to be a nondescript mix of heterogeneous elements that escapes being a precise genre. And then the samples of birds and the Pacific Ocean, well, to me the music is interchangeable and unrelated to these samples. But that's okay too. Music

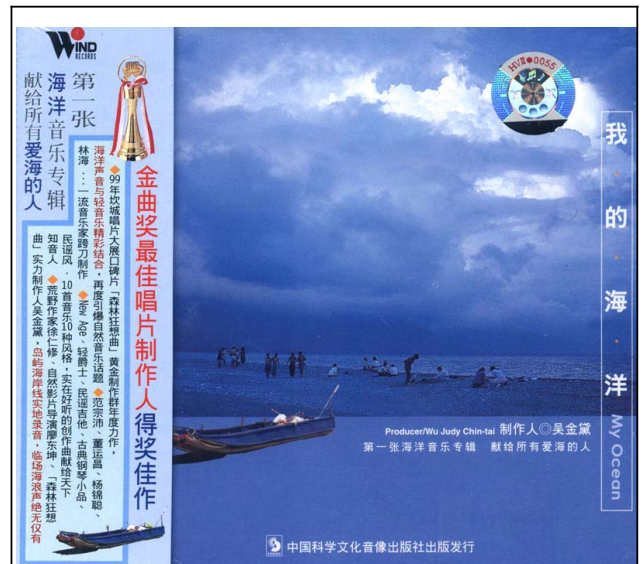


Illustration 5.7: Cover of Wind Music's 2001 album *My Ocean* 我的海洋, for which Judy Wu received the Gold Melody award for best producer.

<sup>62</sup> Judy Wu, conversation, July 2007.

needs concepts such as these, explanations, packaging. It's better to mislead people the way Wind Music does than with covers of magazines and all kinds of gossip ... It's better to do that through music, in that case the package at least contains something, something valuable.

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Samples – or ‘references,’ as Chinese and Taiwanese record companies call them, using the English word – are instrumental in concretizing concepts, and they establish yet another form of crossbreeding. I will now turn to the role of concepts in the creation of an album by Taiwanese hiphop singer DogG, *Lotus Flower with Radiating Tongues* 舌燦蓮花 (2002).

Firstly, Zhang Weiyuan's detailed account of the creative process reflects a typical and productive antagonism between creating and selling the product – an antagonism theorized by Keith Negus in his account of the collaboration and conflicts between the artist & repertoire department and the marketing department within record companies.<sup>64</sup> In this case, though, the antagonism is between specialized companies, rather than between departments within a company. Rock Records, Taiwan's largest indigenous record company, controls the marketing and hence the budget, whereas the Big Circus production team and especially its leader and artist & repertoire manager Li Wenkuan strive to realize their creative visions, together with DogG. Secondly, against the backdrop of this political and financial struggle, Li Wenkuan identifies a set of concepts to guide the creational process:

Propagating Taiwanese consciousness: [Big Circus] expresses support of Taiwan in their own way, and on this album by applying their means – music, lyrics, images – they attempt to sculpt Taiwan and Taiwanese Hip Hop youth as they envision them.<sup>65</sup>

As a newcomer, DogG realizes that his leverage is limited. Although he voices diverging opinions in meetings and says that his viewpoint is much more pluralistic (and less anti-China) than Li Wenkuan's concepts suggest, DogG simultaneously adjusts his lyrics, vocal delivery and image to suit Big Circus' strategy.<sup>66</sup> This strategy also includes preps for public appearances and interviews that encourage DogG to “leave out that ‘comprehensive art form 綜藝的形象’ stuff of his.”<sup>67</sup> The song PUTTING OUT A RECORD 出唱片 on the album is a musical advertisement and contains some reflection on the constraints:

沒有辦法喔 我又沒辦法  
像馬戲團的猴子一樣賺錢  
反正宣傳預算也沒錢  
我是大馬戲團大金剛  
想爬上新光三越  
來幫自己曝光  
這樣會不會有演電影的機會

Can't be helped. No way I can  
make money as the monkeys in the circus do.  
The promotional budget's been slashed, anyhow.  
I am this big circus's Donkey Kong,  
I want to climb the Shin Kong Mitsukoshi Department store  
and help myself to stripping naked...  
Is that what takes to land a film role?

<sup>63</sup> Dong Yun-chang, conversation, July 2007.

<sup>64</sup> Negus 1992.

<sup>65</sup> Zhang 2004a:47.

<sup>66</sup> Zhang 2004a:79.

<sup>67</sup> Zhang 2004a:78.

DogG is by no means free to do as he pleases, but even allowing for this, there is (as Zhang Weiyan points out) a wide gap between the concepts and their materialization in the final album. Bridging this gap involves creative decisions on the part of all participants.<sup>68</sup> Their handiwork of ‘fine-tuning’ the sound-image-text is crucial and defies standardization 版式化. Hence, Zhang rather speaks of mechanisms of (creative) interpretation 詮釋的機制, which he ties to power structures.<sup>69</sup> References guide every step of the process:

[From the striking similarities between these images and DogG’s album design] we can see that during all the work of the production team, ‘references’ [English in original] have a relatively important function as guides and reference 參照. [They use] ‘Reference songs’ during composition and ‘reference models’ during packaging and visual design. Even for DogG’s outfits, the production team consults large quantities of national and international hip hop music and magazines for blacks.<sup>70</sup>

The concepts and the adaptation of the references are developed towards a coherent or even holistic 整体 album by trial and error.

After the producer [Li Wenkuan] and arranger [Wu Congxian] had discussed the concept ..., the arranger started composing [TAIWAN EULOGY 台灣 song].<sup>71</sup> Whenever he finished a demo ... the producer, arranger, artist and the other members of the production team listened to it in a meeting room. This was an instance of ‘concrete appearance’ 具象的呈現, which is neither a language thing nor easily communicable. After listening to the song, everyone engaged in ‘(creative) interpretation.’ Everyone spoke his or her mind, attempting to translate this ‘concrete appearance’ back into abstract, communicable language. ... [After which the respective person(s)] would again use this abstract consensus 共識 to make a new version of the musical or visual passage [and we’d start again] ... We went full-circle time and again, until everyone agreed on the result.<sup>72</sup>

During my own fieldwork, producers explained that similar meetings select all songs for new albums, sometimes out of a hundred demo tapes, labeling a few as the album’s main publicity songs 主打歌, of which clips would be made and on which the marketing would focus.<sup>73</sup> In the case of Big Circus, the album seems to be a byproduct of these consensus-building meetings. As such, the



Illustration 5.8: Cover of DogG’s 2002 album Lotus Flower with Radiating Tongues.

<sup>68</sup> Zhang 2004a:72.

<sup>69</sup> Zhang 2004a:79.

<sup>70</sup> Zhang 2004a:66.

<sup>71</sup> Song refers to the Taiwanese or hoklo pronunciation of *shuang* 爽 ‘cool’, which is then a homonym of song 頌 ‘eulogy.’

<sup>72</sup> Zhang 2004a:59, 60.

<sup>73</sup> Adia, conversation, July 2007, and Huang Ting, conversation, July 2007.

whole production process is the externalization and collectivization of the way the electronic artist Wang Fan folds his selected, manipulated and mixed samples into boundless soundscapes. The role of samples is now taken over by references which form the ‘raw material.’ These referenced entities are well-known and successful creations: they are ‘cheeses’ of proven quality and market appeal. These cheeses are cut up and de-coagulated, releasing particles that can be reused in new constellations of coagulation and folding, aided by concepts that function as enzymes.

Specialization in the popular music industry leads to different levels of commissioning. The standard steps – putting out a commission for composition, arrangement, lyric-setting, music video production and visual design – occur as a combination of rough cuts of a product already in the chain, conceptual outlines of the desired direction, and one or more samples or references.

## §4 Selecting Stars

Cheese production can be presented as clustering and replication in the milk chaosmos (§2), or interbreeding lineages of consolidation and transformation (§3), but also as a process of selecting globules from the milk. The present section focuses on the selection of stars, band members and record industry personnel – a process that includes their strategies of survival and negotiation with gatekeepers in a larger field or ecology.

On May 10<sup>th</sup> 2001, Tian Zhen gate-crashed the Chinese Popular Song Awards held in Nanjing. She tried to explain to the audience that several days earlier the organizers had told her that she lay 4000 votes ahead in an online vote for Favorite Female Singer of the year 2000. However, when Tian told the organizers that she would probably not be able to make it to the ceremony, they gave the number one spot to her rival Na Ying, which Tian Zhen only found out when, after all, she did make it to the ceremony. The incident marked a high point in the rivalry between Tian and Na, and Na actually shed some tears while singing her song, after Tian Zhen had angrily left the stage. More importantly, the event opened the black box of Chinese pop music chart rankings and awards, suggesting that the results could easily be manipulated.

Unlike the Grammy Awards in the USA and Oricon in Japan, there is no authoritative list of pop songs in China. In the PRC, an award ceremony adapted from Hong Kong was held in Guangzhou in 1992, and this led to Beijing Music Radio organizing the first national Chinese Popular Song Awards in 1994. Other yearly hit lists quickly followed, including Channel V’s Global Sinophone Music Charts, which have been available to PRC audiences via satellite since 1998, and a cooperation between CCTV and MTV from 1999 on. PRC audiences eagerly anticipated these ceremonies, which provided rare opportunities to see pop stars who mostly dwelt in Hong Kong and Taiwan. This success prompted a proliferation of awards in the late 1990s, and by 2002 there were allegedly more than 2000 award ceremonies.<sup>74</sup> All these events vied for celebrity presence, which led them to invent new



*Illustration 5.9: Tian Zhen at the 2001 Chinese Popular Song Awards.*

<sup>74</sup> Xu 2009:13.

awards, for instance ‘favorite’ 最受歡迎 in addition to ‘best’ 最佳, ‘most respected’ 至尊, and awards named after the event. In general, award ceremony organizers became more occupied with negotiating with stars and their record companies than with a fair and transparent selection procedure. By 2001 it was a public secret that all the stars present at an award ceremony would get a prize, even if they hadn’t published new material for years.

These yearly red carpet events are often sponsored by companies that want to advertise their product, which partly explains why exposure trumps credibility. Because these companies rarely sponsor radio, radio has a different dynamic. Weekly radio charts are usually established through the tastes of individual DJs and hearsay, and are usually open to suggestions of record companies. According to a 2001 article by He Jianxue, plugging a song in a radio chart usually costs between 200 and 1000 RMB, and occasionally 10,000 RMB.<sup>75</sup> Singers and the industry as a whole seem to regard this as an acceptable instrument for “stir-frying” songs into hits, which also includes paying journalists for favorable reviews. Also in Taiwan, record companies close large package deals with television stations that include the appearance of stars in popular programs, exclusive interviews, and commercial slots for their latest songs. Promotion thus eats up a large proportion of album budgets.<sup>76</sup>

After the Tian Zhen incident in 2001 and subsequent scandals, the credibility of music award ceremonies in the PRC rapidly declined. Even more so than before, the events became parades of various kinds of celebrities rather than evaluations of musical merit. In Hong Kong, public distrust was fueled in 2003 by the alleged bribing of the Jade Solid Gold Best Ten Songs by Albert Yeung, founder of the mighty Hong Kong Emperor Entertainment Group. Nevertheless, the Jade Solid Gold Best Ten Songs (since 1984) and the RTHK Top 10 Golden Songs Award (since 1978) have remained authoritative in Hong Kong and a model in the business. By the way, Faye Wong won the Jade Solid Gold award for Asia-Pacific Most Popular Hong Kong Female Artist seven times between 1993 and 2000, and her songs made it into the RTHK Top 10 an equal number of times in roughly the same period. Since 2001 Mainland Chinese stars have been able to participate in the RTHK Top 10, but given the overall decline of cantopop since the late 1990s, its influence has waned.

In 2008, the PRC Top Chinese Music Chart Awards (founded in 2001) attempted to restore credibility by appointing a relatively transparent jury of twenty prominent musicians, producers and critics and by having the election procedure supervised by New York-based auditor Deloitte, which also handles the Grammy Awards envelopes. However, in tune with the dominance of Taiwanese popular music since 2000, the Taiwanese Golden Melody Awards, established in 1990, remains a trendsetter in Chinese pop. In 1998 they opened the competition to all singers who had published Chinese-language albums in Taiwan. Faye Wong was awarded Best Mandarin Female Performer in 2004.

The first two steps in the Golden Melody Awards selection procedure involve consultation with large numbers of specialists, for shortlisting candidates. Only in the final phase does a small committee meet to rank the contesters, which means that the selection and tastes of this committee are contested, and that committee members are sometimes incapable of awarding their personal favorite because he or she didn’t make it to the shortlist. Given the fact that controversy over such in-

<sup>75</sup> He 2001.

<sup>76</sup> Adia, conversation, July 2007, and Huang Ting, conversation, July 2007. Cf. *The Heavenly Kings* (d. Wu, 2006).

fluent gatekeeping seems inevitable, and the relative unreliability of hit lists in the PRC, the Golden Melody Awards functions well, albeit perhaps conservatively. The Taiwanese folk singer Panai explains:

Taiwanese music lacks subjectivity 自主性. When I was a jury member for the Golden Melody Awards the record companies only wanted things that fit their narrow formats. The companies, but also the local government we cooperate with in a music festival here in Taidong, only want something that looks good, that is easy to package. They want a cake with a nice icing, neglecting the variety of ingredients and preparation needed to make it taste good as well. Fortunately I could often convince the other jury members given my prestige as performing artist.<sup>77</sup>

## The Super Girl Pool

In the spring of 2005, over 120,000 candidates applied for the auditions of the second edition of *Super Girl Contest* 超級女聲, a television program by Hunan Satellite Television based on the British format of *Pop Idols*. The opening tune and the slogan “Sing when you want” 想唱就唱 already suggested that everyone with sufficient will could be a pop star—provided they get the right guidance. Simon Frith has described this idea as the Talent Pool, where success lies in the right combination of talents under the supervision of a record company. Frith argues that although audiences focus on artists, creative decisions are dispersed over multitudes of people:

The ‘creative’ role in his pop scheme is assigned to the *packagers*, the record producers, clothes designers, magazine editors, etc.; they are the ‘authors’ of success, the intelligence of the system.<sup>78</sup>

This view of pop artists as mere puppets is widespread. Andrew Jones is skeptical about the opportunities for creative input singers in the PRC had in the early 1990s, and the Taiwanese rapper DogG had no choice but to comply with the conceptual framework constructed by his manager Li Wenkuan.<sup>79</sup> Although in DogG’s case decisions were made in apparently democratic meetings, Li manufactured consent by hand-picking his employees. The relatively weak position of aspiring musicians is also evidenced by the phenomenon of ‘frozen’ singers, where companies neither invest in a singer nor terminate his or her contract. It had taken half a year since DogG was signed before they started working on an album, Faye Wong was temporarily put on hold by Cinetop, and so was Second Hand Rose for over a year with Music Nation.<sup>80</sup>

However, this representation of events makes the artists appear overly passive. As elsewhere in the world, in the PRC the appeal of *Pop Idols* was based on audience participation. Besides gender, there were no restrictions on applicants, and as such the show was hailed as a break with the paternalism of the PRC entertainment industry.<sup>81</sup> The selection process started with auditions before

<sup>77</sup> Panai and Nabu, conversation, July 2007.

<sup>78</sup> Frith 1988:113.

<sup>79</sup> Jones 1992.

<sup>80</sup> Katie Chan, conversation, August 2007. Liang Long, conversation, June 2007.

<sup>81</sup> San 2006. The air of vulgarizing iconoclasm is also supported by a conflict over popularity the provincial TV station had with the planned-market leader CCTV. With viewer rates estimated around 400 million, *Super Girl Contest* dethroned CCTV’s Chinese New Year Event as the most-watched program of the year. Upon the center’s demands,

appointed juries on March 19<sup>th</sup> in five cities (not including the traditional cultural centers of Beijing and Shanghai) and ended on August 26<sup>th</sup> with finals decided by much more democratic procedures.<sup>82</sup> During the finals the role of the jury was mainly ceremonial, praising all three finalists in superlatives. By contrast, the audience was rowdy and especially the yellow-uniformed fans of Chris Lee at times shouted down the other contestants. Lee eventually won with 3,528,308 SMS votes. In-between these extremes, the contest displayed a variety of selection procedures, of which perhaps the most widely known is ‘PK.’ PK stands for ‘player killed’ and originates from computer games such as *Counter Strike* in which two teams fight each other to the death. In the television show, the English abbreviation denotes a duel of two contestants singled out by the jury and/or SMS votes. After they are given a final chance to pledge and sing, previous contestants come forward one by one to cast their votes publicly, and thus eventually send one of the two PK’ers home crying. Although similar to biological selection, contingency plays a major role in *Super Girl*; nevertheless the success of contestants, and indeed of the program as a whole, lies in the singers’ active involvement in the soap-series-like narrative development. The purposefully tantalizing battles and meticu-



Illustration 5.10: The three finalists of *Super Girl* 2005.

lous selection procedures aim to produce foundational histories of idols that will nurture relationships with millions of fans. A lot has changed since Frith published his article. He ascribes duration and hardship not to the Talent Pool, but to the contrasting model of the Rock Pyramid in which bands work their way to the international top.<sup>83</sup>

## Star Organism Faye Wong

Stars negotiate between ego and identity on the one hand and crowds and multiplicity on the other, both in consumption and production. Faye Wong provides a unique voice and face for products that are the result of her associated milieu, consisting of many players.<sup>84</sup> The selective pressure of pop’s massive audiences is on stars as a whole, whereas the fitness of particular contributors such as sound engineers and hair-dressers is internally decided.<sup>85</sup> Interviewees pointed out that if a singer flops, the blame is passed around the associated network like a hot potato.<sup>86</sup> I will now look into the tension between the individuality and the multiplicity of the star Faye Wong.

Hunan Satellite Television pledged to include more healthy and non-exciting songs and to show fewer shots of ecstatic fans – but to no avail, since viewer rates and demands for advertisement slots kept soaring.

<sup>82</sup> See the roundtable discussion with the cultural critics Li Yinhe, Yu Guoming and Zhu Dake on *Super Girl*’s contributions to a democratic ‘civil society’ through, for instance, the popular criticism of the judges (Zhao 2005).

<sup>83</sup> Frith 1988:111, see also Negus 1992:54-56.

<sup>84</sup> Deleuze 1987:51.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Deleuze 1987: 52.

<sup>86</sup> Huang Ting, conversation, July 2007.

Dai Sicong: “When Faye Wong was introduced to me [in 1988] I was already a famous star maker. They called me the godfather of the music scene. One day someone called me who was connected to a TV station where I often appeared and who was also an acquaintance of Faye’s mother. Faye’s mother was an opera singer, and she thought that the modeling Faye did at the time could develop into a popular music career.

The first time I met Faye, I didn’t think she was very special. She was tall and slender and her big eyes drew attention, but she dressed poorly. She sang at the piano and her voice was already very good. I heard that typical sweet sound, which can only be talent. At the same time she needed a lot of tutoring. She was much too ‘mainland Chinese’ ”<sup>87</sup>

Groenewegen: “Then why did you decide to work with her? And how do you select your students in general?”

Dai: “I look for three things in potential stars: appearance, voice and character. With Faye all these were good, and she was also very eager to learn—that’s also an important criterion. Furthermore, at the age of nineteen, twenty, she was young. ... My classes consist of three parts. For the basic vocal techniques we do exercises from opera 聲樂 first and then we sing covers. We also do music theory, because understanding music better is important for the musical feel 音樂感, which transcends technique. Finally, there’s singing in tune 音准, my students have to be able to hold the key. If all goes well, we practice in front of an audience. I take them to private parties, local contests and karaoke halls. If they can control their nerves in front of a hundred people, performing before thousands or tens of thousands is no problem either. ... Faye was so young back then, she didn’t have a clue. I was the first to tell her to be confident. I taught Faye how to carry herself 做人的道路. We constantly talked at her in order to get her to dress and behave. I even gave her a new name, Wang Jingwen.

[After initial setbacks, such as failing to strike a deal with Wing Hang Records], Polygram’s CEO Duan believed in my star-making abilities. He wanted to sign Faye with Cinepoly, a subsidiary of Polygram. Although Faye did not sing technically perfectly during the audition, she managed to convince Cinepoly’s producer Alvin Leong. But director Chen Xiaobao opposed the deal. Thereupon I kept inviting Chen to dinner, but to no avail. Later in 1989 Faye won the second prize in a contest organized by CASH, and only then did Chen Xiaobao agree to sign her.<sup>88</sup> After that, the company decided everything for her. They hired professionals to redo her image. Usually they also assign the star to a manager they feel can do the job. I don’t know why Faye hired Katie Chan.”<sup>89</sup>

Dai Sicong is a gatekeeper who selects potential singers, molds them to increase their appeal and introduces them to record companies. By saying “There are three people who have made Faye what she is: her father, me and Chen Xiaobao,” he actively negates the roles of Faye Wong and her mother, as well as Wong’s development after Cinepoly.<sup>90</sup> He does not seem to think of the way he molds his students as violent or overbearing, although next to instruction on vocal techniques this also in-

<sup>87</sup> See Chapter 1. Although Dai Sicong himself is originally from Mainland China and speaks fluent Mandarin, he seems to have been one of the driving forces behind Faye’s Hong Kong-ification.

<sup>88</sup> The contest is ABU, and the song is STILL THOSE SAME OLD WORDS 仍是舊句子, written and produced by Alvin Leong.

<sup>89</sup> Dai Sicong, conversation, September 2007. See also Wang 1998:168.

<sup>90</sup> Dai Sicong, conversation, September 2007.

cludes pressure to accept a certain type of behavior and view of life. This implies that to Dai Sicong students have no independent identity and are extensions of their teachers/fathers.

Rather than with these ethical considerations, Dai is concerned with stressing that he makes art as opposed to profits. “I taught her the art, and later those managers of hers made all the money,” he says, surprisingly spiteful. For all their differences, both Dai and Faye Wong’s manager Katie Chan claim to blend professional coaching with emotional care. During the interview cited below, Chan even shed tears when she recounted her memories.

Katie Chan’s career started in the 1980s when she produced a daily pop music show on TVB television with Celine Chao:

The years at TVB were tough. In those years I developed what I think is my most valuable skill: my emphatic understanding of the audience. Later Celine and I started Brain Child, one of the earliest concert operators in Hong Kong, and I got to adjust my insights in the context of live shows. Also in my activities as a manager I focus on the relationship between artist and audience. For instance, I advise Faye to be aware that people observe her constantly. She easily gets bored at award ceremonies, during which I must persuade her to stay alert and not let it show on her face. Or during the break in a concert I ask how the people in the first ring are doing—she picks up on these hints real quickly.

The artists I manage are like my own children. ... Faye has always been very restrained, except for one time. In late 1993 she called me, saying with this tiny voice, “I am Wang Jingwen, and my record producer [Alvin Leong] says I need a manager.” At the time Faye was in a difficult position. Her previous manager [Chen Jiantian] was only in it for the money and had sold her rights [for two million HKD] to Rock Records in Taiwan. However, Rock Records was not planning to move on this anytime soon, and in the meantime Cinepoly understood that Faye had potential and put a lot of pressure on Faye to renew their contract. They even threatened to freeze her, which means no promotion and no airplay, nothing less but the end of her career. So Faye called me in distress. The first thing I did was travel to Taiwan to meet Sam Duan, the CEO of Rock Records. I knew him very well, and asked him: “If you’re not doing anything with her, then let her go!” and Sam simply tore up the contract. Just like that. Then I helped Faye with renegotiating a three-year contract with Cinepoly. All for free: we didn’t sign a management contract until months later. Then Angela came, who manages the Faye Wong account.<sup>91</sup>

Just like Dai Sicong, Katie Chan regards her stars as kin. However, her style is persuasive rather than authoritative. Her cooperation with Wong, Eason Chan and the Korean singer Rain is based on mutual trust and shared interests, and only secondarily backed by three- to five-year business plans that she draws up. When I asked her how Faye Wong’s albums and images are made, she explained:

Usually Faye comes up with the ideas. ... When Faye wants something about eternity or being unattainable, Lam Chik concretizes it in a set of lyrics. At times record companies would find that difficult. For instance, when the lyrics were all about dinosaurs such as on *Fable*. ...

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<sup>91</sup> Katie Chan, conversation, July 2007.

Faye never bothered about the consequences, leaving the trouble of dealing with the company to me. Because we were successful we could get away with it.

We would always go on the road with the same team, with very few changes: Faye, me, Angela and the hairstylist Elaine [Wong]. Faye wanted it like that: she's shy and doesn't open to people easily. At a certain moment, I became her buffer to the outside world. I even represented her at meetings at her child's school. She also never bothered about finances. Not even in 1997 when I was very successful at playing companies off against each other and managed to secure a sixty-million contract with EMI. But she's meticulous about the things that pertain to her directly, namely her sound – she insists on picking the live band – and some aspects of her appearance.<sup>92</sup>

Malaysia-born Alvin Leong was production supervisor at Cinepoly for Leslie Cheung's albums and later Faye Wong's.<sup>93</sup> His working style is explained in a published interview:

Alvin Leong likes to listen to music together with the singers. In the process of listening the singer will select the songs he or she likes and Alvin Leong will also talk about the style of his liking. While listening together they will reach consensus on a number of songs they both like, which they will elaborate according to the style of the singer to build an album. Back then, Shirley Wong's first album was cooked up in this way. ... [Leong says:] At the time I had just come back from America, and I liked American R&B a lot, so we made R&B songs. I didn't consider what the outside world thought of it. Fortunately the record company supported me.<sup>94</sup>

The R&B sound of Wong's first three albums originated from Alvin Leong, and later he introduced Faye Wong to the British sound of the Cranberries and Cocteau Twins.<sup>95</sup> In another interview, Leong elaborates on the relationship between artist and producer:

I often say that communication is important because I want to 'be a tight-fitting garment' to every one of my singers. Singers are artists and production supervisors are artists too. Art inevitably entails subjectivity and persistence. So I understood from early on that there's no room in a recording studio for two artists. Whenever recording, I will abandon my own artistic attitude somewhat. Of course I am not the kind of person to hand my faith to the gods, and neither would I just drift along. I only make an effort to choose my words carefully. For instance, I won't say "The way you sang this is no good," but instead I'll say, "Let's record another time, ok?" ... I can abandon my artistic perspective on details, but I won't choose to yield or compromise when the requirements of an album are concerned. Ideally, production supervisor and singer merge into one another, [so] there's no submission of one to the other. The secret to success is still: communication.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Katie Chan, conversation, July 2007.

<sup>93</sup> Anonymous 2005a.

<sup>94</sup> Anonymous 2005.

<sup>95</sup> Katie Chan interview, confirmed by quoted interview above.

<sup>96</sup> Anonymous 2005a.

A key term in Alvin Leong's utopian discourse is *moqi* 默契, 'tacit understanding or consensus.' In these terms, not being explicit is perhaps an effective strategy to mitigate the subjectivity and persistence that would otherwise lead to conflicts between singer and producer. As long as the artist does not persist in opinions that digress from the producer's plans, Leong can elaborate the sonic identity of the singer towards the R&B and Britpop he likes. The stylist Tomas Chan supports this reading:

Faye Wong doesn't have any high demands. We worked together for some time, [so] she trusts us. Of course she'd still participate and voice her opinions. Decision-making power is ultimately in her hands ... For instance, without knowing she'd show her preferences while she reads a book or plays a game. We would understand her mind under these circumstances and then improve from there, that's our tacit understanding. So as for Faye Wong's participation in her own image and the height of her demands, I'd say the initiative actually comes from her.<sup>97</sup>

Producer and songwriter Zhang Yadong also regards Wong as a driving force. He first cooperated with her in 1994 and became a principal influence on her sound after *Di-dar* (1995) and especially *Impatience* (1996).

Reporter: "[You were one of the first] 'cooks' behind the scenes to step into the limelight and become widely known, is that also because of your cooperation with Faye Wong?"

Zhang: "You could say so. Faye Wong is very, very important. Basically she made me. At the time, no other singer would have given a newcomer like me a chance, and Wong gave me such a free hand, saying feel free to do whatever you like, which leaves you without pressure. Back then she was open to any strange sound. The music of *Impatience* and *Fable* [2000] was unconventional in its day, but she allowed you to do it."<sup>98</sup>

Apparently, Faye Wong (a) selects talented people; (b) gives them the vaguest of directions; (c) allows them the space to do what they are good at, which – as we will see below – sometimes includes complying with their stage directives during sound recordings, photo shoots, interviews and so on; and perhaps (d) reevaluates the connection according to the results and the demands of third parties. Wong's make-up artist A Zing has been responsible for some of her well-known looks. He recounts the first time they worked together:

In 1992 or 1993 we did a photo shoot for the cover of *City Magazine* 號外. Back then I had just moved from Singapore to Hong Kong. I had a preconceived beauty

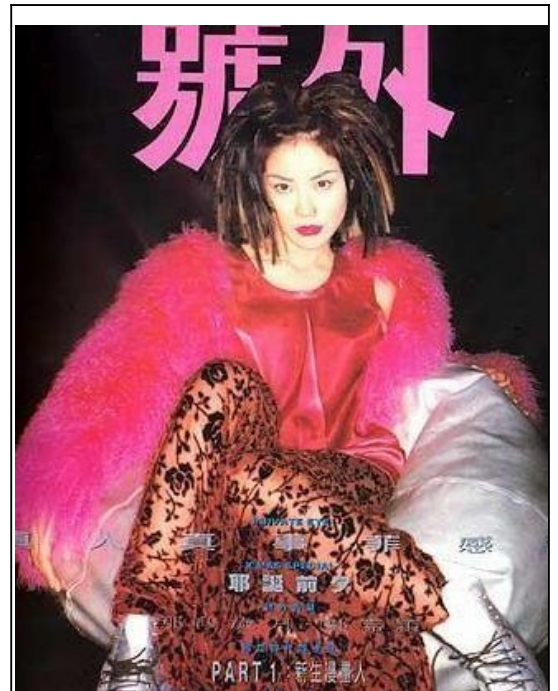


Illustration 5.11: Faye Wong on the cover of *City Magazine*.

<sup>97</sup> Wang 1998: 125-126.

<sup>98</sup> Chen 2007.

idea, or rather, I had a preconceived idea of what good make-up was and I stamped it on every face, without considering their own features. At the time I thought good make-up is long false lashes, full lips and so on. Well, it didn't work for Faye. Next to the cover of the magazine I also did her make-up in the clip for *EASILY HURT WOMAN*. It was an even bigger disaster, I simply applied what was 'in' at the moment: huge red lips etc., and I didn't consider the lighting.

After that she avoided me and did her own make-up. It wasn't until about two years later that the photographer who did the cover of *A Hundred Thousand Whys* 十萬個為什麼 (1993SEPT) wanted me to do the make-up. Faye said no. That was 1994. For me the clip of *EASILY HURT WOMAN* had been a turning point. I abandoned projection and 'good make-up,' opting instead to be sensitive both to the face of the artist and the 'third point of view,' which is the audience, or rather, reception as an abstract, general notion.

When Faye agreed to meet me in 1994 she was very cold and blunt. We sat backstage and she was flipping through magazines. She wanted me to pick what I liked, "Do you like this?" "Yeah." "Well, I don't," she'd say (laughs) – very blunt. She wanted things not to be so stiff. She was really ahead of her time. We had three days for the album cover, I still got it wrong the first day. Faye didn't like any of the pics and we decided to shoot outside the second day, start all over. That was much better. We shot the picture that went on the cover the third day indoors.

Faye had the final say in everything. She was easy to work with, but sometimes her ideas would be too far ahead of our time. For *Ingratiate Yourself* 討好自己 (1994) or *Random Thinking* (1994) she wanted to do snapshots [This was probably for *Secret* (1994)]. That was very new and the photographer didn't get it. And her ideas were not always well received by critics. But everything sold, so the record company was OK with it. Faye could wear anything, she made everything work. In 1995 she introduced Titi Kwan to the team, who from then on took care of the visual image. Titi lived in Paris and could get his hands on the best European fashion. He was very talented and provided coherence. Before that not all the elements would necessarily add up to a consistent idea, but now the images became much stronger.<sup>99</sup>



Illustration 5.12: Faye Wong on the cover of her 1993 album *A Hundred Thousand Whys*.

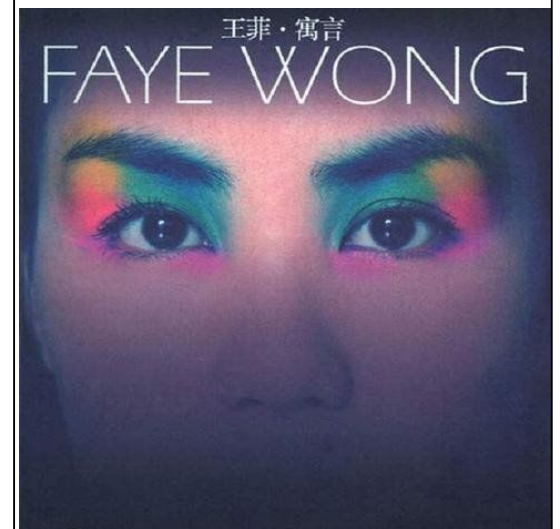


Illustration 5.13: Faye Wong on the cover of her 2000 album *Fable*.

<sup>99</sup> A Zing, conversation, August 2007.

A Zing clearly met with reluctance on Faye Wong's side, but was eventually selected, doubtless also for the merits of his work with artists such as Sammi Cheng. By contrast, the hair stylist Elaine Wong, a friend who was part of Faye Wong's team, had to make way for Ben Lee in the late 1990s, "because Elaine got stuck somewhere, she kept using the same looks."<sup>100</sup>

Secondly, as a make-up artist, A Zing realized he could only express himself through the faces of others. Not only A Zing, but all interviewees stressed that their relationship to Faye Wong was one of serving her, while taking the initiative as necessary. Video director Susie Au:

I thought KNOW YOURSELF AND EACH OTHER [1994] had something virtual 虛 to it, so I wanted to express that in the MTV. I made Faye stand in front of a blue screen and do all these weird movements. She didn't understand, but I said: "Just trust me." We recorded it, and later she let me know through an assistant that she loved the clip. We cooperated a lot since then.

Usually the record company would select three of four songs after an album was recorded to become the main publicity songs, for which they needed clips. After they contacted me, I would brainstorm with my art director Thomas Chen, the assistant director and later also Faye's hair-stylist Elaine Wong. Then we would inform A Zing. We treated the clips as mini-films, which was new in Hong Kong. We'd draft a minimal narrative and then a work plan, but there wouldn't be an elaborate script. Also we wouldn't tell Faye. If I'd tell her there was a story, she'd say "I can't role-play 演戲." So I'd only give her very concrete directions, such as, walk from this spot to that spot while looking over your shoulder now and then as if you're on the run [in A HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE 百年孤独 (1999)]. I later recognized this stealthy, documentary way of filming Faye in Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express*.<sup>101</sup>

Au mentions a variety of inspirational sources, including narratives proposed by the music and lyrics, ideas put forth by Faye Wong, but also references to cultural tropes, images and plot lines that originate from Au and her team. She furthermore shows how Faye Wong is both decisive for the project as a whole and, during the actual recording, cooperative in roles scripted by others. Titi Kwan also fondly remembers manipulating Wong into spontaneous role-acting:

Titi Kwan: "We never had any real meetings (A Zing nods in agreement). Faye would at most suggest a general direction in a few words. I first met her during a photo shoot for a magazine I was working for. She hated the process, she hates fitting, but we were also the first ones to ask her to be natural and spontaneous, and the results were very good. So later we went shopping together in Paris and then I started to help her create an image that wasn't as artificial as that of the other Hong Kong stars. We did *Decadent Sounds* (1995JUL) and then the cover of *Di-dar* (1995DEC). For *Di-dar* she said she wanted something casual (A Zing chuckles). They called for a fitting, but I said it wasn't necessary. They thought it was going to be very plain, but I was thinking more about the attitude than the actual clothes. So on the shooting day, all these huge dresses arrived and Faye was shocked. That was the so-called butterfly look." ...

<sup>100</sup> Katie Chan, conversation, July 2007.

<sup>101</sup> Susie Au, conversation, July 2007.



王菲 [Wōn' Fei'] ~ Di-Dar  
 Illustration 5.14: Faye Wong on the cover of her 1995 album Di-Dar.



Illustration 5.15: Faye Wong during her 2004 concert in Shanghai.

Groenewegen: “Did you have a plan for linking the various looks together?”

Titi Kwan: “There was no plan, we grew naturally. We were so young and didn’t realize what we were doing. It was a dream job, we just did whatever we thought was fun. And Faye always looked fantastic. Of course we also had quite some arguments over the years, especially with the photographer who wouldn’t get it. ... During the last show of her last tour in Guangzhou [in 2004], it was freezing and Faye was wearing all these flimsy dresses. I could see she was cold. So halfway the show I ran over to where manager Katie Chan was sitting, took her fur coat, and backstage I threw it on Faye Wong. Faye hardly even reacted: she probably only felt the thing was soft and warm. She performed great, and the fur blended into the rest of her outfit, it looked as if it was planned, that’s how spontaneous she is.”<sup>102</sup>

Given the degree of autonomy of the members of her team, Faye Wong can be seen as a set of disparate sound bits, pixels and scattered remarks elicited and manipulated by a host of individuals. Audiences project coherence and depth onto them because they want to. However, moving towards the other side of this scale and proceeding from the idea that the star contributes a brand name that conveniently denotes this nebula of globules, we could argue that the exclusive endorsement of this brand guarantees a minimum of coherence. Although Faye Wong’s image and sound have gone through great changes over the years, she participates in and thus connects all of them. Indeed, there is reason to believe that Faye Wong’s ability to organize and transcend her associated milieu is what makes her a true star:

Reporter: “People can choose music, but you can’t expect to stumble upon singers suitable for performing your own music. *Fable* and oth-

<sup>102</sup> A Zing and Titi Kwan, conversation, August 2007.

er albums you produced for Faye Wong seem to be entirely tailor-made for her. The style is consistent throughout, just like concept albums.”

Zhang Yadong: “In fact, for neither of those two records did I consider any album concepts (laughs). It’s the strength of Faye Wong herself. Her own character can unify songs with entirely heterodox styles into a single body! But most artists lack that ability, so when I produce for others, I need to know what they exactly want. This involves preliminary planning, because I don’t like albums to have internal conflicts.”<sup>103</sup>

## An Ecology of *Guanxi*

Marc Moskowitz argues:

Mandapop’s acceptance of coproduced songs may also point to a greater focus on teamwork than the obsession with individual performance ... Mandapop lyricists and composers also become famous in their own right. ... [For instance the Taipei-based lyricist Michelle] wants to leave her own mark on the music she composes rather than just doing what the artist has done before. Because songwriters and performers are mixed and matched, Mandapop performers can explore a wide range of identities.<sup>104</sup>

Just like make-up artists, video directors and, say, karaoke singers, producers and lyricists express themselves through the works of others, whom they carefully select:

Zhang Yadong: “Don’t take all commissions as the same thing. You need to cooperate with a star to create your own recognizable style, your trademark.”

Tan Yizhe: “Yes, I’ve already realized this problem.”<sup>105</sup>

Producers often establish their own independent companies, which requires cultivating relations with stars, mainstream record companies, studio artists, investors, audiences and regulators. These connections are crucial to the survival of indie companies in a niche of the larger ecology, and are described in Chinese as *guanxi* 關係 ‘ties of allegiance.’ *Guanxi* generically denotes Chinese structures of interpersonal relations that in the West are sometimes associated with corruption, but that in China are embedded in respectable traditions such as Confucianism and in popular expressions surrounding, for instance, *ganqing* 感情 ‘feelings, emotions of attachment, love’ and *mianzi* 面子 ‘face, dignity, reputation,’ which can be damaged and lost if reciprocal *guanxi* are disrespected.<sup>106</sup> Jason Cho of the Hong Kong production company People Mountain People Sea describes their collaboration with Faye Wong:

Kubert Leung who was the supervising producer of the album is an old friend of us.<sup>107</sup> Like most people who contact us, Kubert knows what we do. Usually record companies request demos from publishing houses, who have enormous backlogs and are more than willing to

<sup>103</sup> Chen 2007.

<sup>104</sup> Moskowitz 2010:107-108.

<sup>105</sup> Zhang Yadong and Tan Yizhe, conversation, October 2007.

<sup>106</sup> Bian 1997:369.

<sup>107</sup> In the 1980s his band Ukiyo-e had made a name for themselves in the Hong Kong alternative music scene, alongside Tat Ming Pair, the former band of Anthony Wong, who founded People Mountain People Sea.

send demos in the musical style described by the record company because a selected song means revenue for them. Conversely, we don't pull songs out of the fridge, but compose songs that are tailored to the artist. Especially for artists with their own ideas about production, this is a plus.

Kubert gave no directions, saying "just do anything you think fits." Eventually he selected a song written by Gaybird [titled COLOR BLIND 色盲 (2001)] out of the two or three we proposed. With HERO 英雄 it was much more complicated because the director and film company who were now involved had definite demands and Faye was less active as a singer. The film producer approached us through Susy Au. Zhang Yadong had written the song and they wanted Faye to sing it. Somehow they decided that [the boss of our company] Anthony [Wong] should produce it, maybe because Faye was in Hong Kong at the time.

Most of the members of our company we know either through the Hong Kong indie scene, such as Gaybird who is in the band Multiplex, or through the theater group Zuni Icosahedron, such as Susie Au.<sup>108</sup>

The overlap of professional assessment and favoritism is the basis on which Chinese independent production companies operate. Not only Anthony Wong's People Mountain People Sea in Hong Kong, but also Zhang Yadong's Dong Music and Shen Lihui's Modern Sky in Beijing and TCM in Taiwan are groups of friends that thrive on the connections and tastes of their leader, in Bourdieuan terms: his social and cultural capital. In other words, *guanxi* are tied to persons, not to companies. As such they complicate the clichéd opposition between Oriental collectivity and Occidental individualism that Moskowitz alludes to. Chinese companies, as well as underground bands, are organized around individuals. These so called *linghun* 靈魂, 'souls' or 'inspirers,' head a family-like circle of friends. Without them, nothing can be decided. In Dong Music, employees call Zhang Yadong older brother Dong, which illustrates both the apparent intimacy within the company and Zhang's undisputed leadership.

These networks of friends are born of necessity and convenience. Working with friends also benefits trust and coherence. Ideally, singers are part of this network. Jason Cho:

We encourage artists to get involved, it's more interesting that way. We don't manipulate. Sometimes it's just like playing in a band. It's all about interaction. Working at People Mountain People Sea is like playing in several bands at the same time.<sup>109</sup>

Just like in these indie companies, democracy is rare on the PRC band scene. In *Rites and Rock in Peking (Rites et Rock à Pékin)* (2001) Catherine Capdeville-Zeng argues that through rock, which is the emotional and musical center that Cui Jian embodies, "potential discord [in his band] is relegated to a secondary, formal level, that of [Confucian] rites."<sup>110</sup> She describes how in the early 1990s Cui Jian disciplined both his band during practice and the audience during concerts, like a conductor.<sup>111</sup> Band members join for the money or because they admire Cui Jian's music and feel that by performing it, it somehow becomes theirs too. At the same time Cui Jian remains the undisputed

<sup>108</sup> Jason Cho, conversation, August 2007.

<sup>109</sup> Jason Cho, conversation, August 2007.

<sup>110</sup> Capdeville-Zeng 2001:134.

<sup>111</sup> Capdeville-Zeng 2001:126 and 308.

“creative engine” imbued with truth and authority to which the others “transfer their effort to merge into the total Cui Jian oeuvre.”<sup>112</sup> Capdeville-Zeng concludes not that Cui Jian is a Western-style autonomous individual in the course of expressing himself, but an Oriental “movement of heart-mind” that always anticipates relating to communities large and small.<sup>113</sup> As such, Cui Jian is a combination of Erving Goffman’s umpire who enables the game to unfold by restricting its players and Elias Canetti’s conductor who “ranks himself first among the servants of music” and simultaneously is “inside the mind of every player.”<sup>114</sup>

Not only Cui Jian, but also the ‘three outstanding ones of Magic Stone’ 磨岩三杰 of the early 1990s, were individuals rather than bands: He Yong, Zhang Chu and Dou Wei (ex-Black Panther). Most lead singers of prominent bands of the mid- and late 1990s went solo, such as Feng Jiangzhou of the Fly and Zuoxiao Zuzhou of No. Other bands went through major changes, often leaving only the singer in place, such as Qiu Ye of The Master Says. Xie Tianxiao’s transformation of Cold Blooded Animal into his accompanying band from the 2000s onwards is another case in point.

However, there are exceptions. Capdeville-Zeng juxtaposes what she calls ‘imperial bands’ such as Cui Jian to holistic 整體 bands. Holistic bands make decisions on the basis of consensus in the whole group, which is how Tang Dynasty, Tongue, Miserable Faith, Subs, Joyside, New Pants, P.K.14, Carsick Cars and Queen Sea Big Shark present themselves. When explaining how their music is created, especially the younger musicians rarely talk of the ‘inspiration’ 靈感 of a creative soul. They favor the less conspicuous term *dongji* 動機 ‘motive.’ It suggests that creation is a collective process triggered by for instance a bass lick, to which the guitar player responds. Paradoxically, most holistic bands in China play a combination of hard, Underground rock styles, such as metal, punk and New Wave, imported from the ‘individualistic’ West.

Xiao He is clearly in charge of Glorious Pharmacy, especially since the departure of saxophone player Li Tieqiao in 2005. Around that time Xiao He had emerged as a solo performer, and by 2010 Glorious Pharmacy stopped rehearsing because they had no shows planned, while Xiao He has a busy schedule. However, compared to Cui Jian and Xie Tianxiao, Xiao He seems to be less interested in realizing his artistic ideas and expressing himself than in engaging people, and more prepared to shift agency to his environment. He often improvises with (visiting) musicians or artists, and in his solo shows he tries to remain sensitive to the performance situation. When I asked him in 2006 what SIMPLE TRUTH was about, he said:

“I used to wanted to be hurt [by my girlfriends], I thought I needed that to make music,” gesturing with a hand holding a cigarette. He puts the guitar case down at the bus stop on our way to his weekly, improvised performance in the Nameless Highland. “Why don’t you use lyrics anymore?”, I asked as I tried to keep the conversation going amidst gusts of cold and dust. Xiao He: “Now, I don’t need all that anymore. Anything can inspire me. Things that I see in the bar, paintings, someone’s face.” “So it’s mostly visual things,” I ask. Xiao He looks puzzled. “I mean, not stories you heard, things you read in a newspaper. Or other

<sup>112</sup> Capdeville-Zeng 2001:131-135, 224-226, see also Zhao 1994: 148-163.

<sup>113</sup> Capdeville-Zeng 2001:319-320.

<sup>114</sup> Goffman 1959:60; Canetti 1962:458-460.

music, like the songs of others, or sounds.” He thinks for a moment: “No, mainly visual. Sometimes changing the format 模式 itself is a breakthrough.”<sup>115</sup>

In 2010 Xiao He claimed that he didn’t need inspiration, that he could create music anytime. And indeed, his speed in composing film scores has been remarkable. His Internet-advertised project “Twelve Musical Portraits of 2010” 2010 的 12 幅音樂肖像 seeks to develop this even further:

Each month of 2010, Xiao He will write a song for one person, telling a story from their lives. Anyone who wants his or her portrait sung by Xiao He can apply via email. A proper application should include: Personal information (resume and contact info) and a brief statement about why you want a song written for yourself. Xiao He will choose one person based on the applications received that month, and make an appointment with him/her in order to know more. At the end of 2010, Xiao He will hold a concert for those twelve chosen people, and will publish the music album: *Xiao He: Twelve Musical Portraits of 2010*.<sup>116</sup>

## Specialization in Second Hand Rose

Let me introduce the population 人口 of Second Hand Rose.

On guitar: Yao Lan. Looks like Lennon, doesn’t he? Yeah, quite the Lennon, just doesn’t know when to die.

On bass: Jiang Ningzhan. He’s a businessman, someone who harms other people.

On folk winds: Wu Zekun. Proponent of five generations. In fact, the previous five generations were all [playing] on fly-overs.

On drums: Beibei. Olympic mascot [One of the five Olympic mascots happened to have the same name].

And me: Little Dragon (*long*). But once a fortune-teller told me: Liang Long (Dragon Liang), you need to change your name into Liang Chong (Bug Liang), that would be ultra auspicious. Let’s start today in this small circle. Please call me Buggy. Thanks.

This is how Liang Long introduced Second Hand Rose in early 2008. Over time, they seem to have been at least three different bands that are conflated only because they share a number of songs, a lead singer and a band name. Liang is the ‘soul’ connecting them, but lacks the will and financial power to assume centrality the way for instance Faye Wong and Cui Jian do. Liang Long depends on his *guanxi* with band members, friends and to a lesser extent on record companies to keep Second Hand Rose afloat, which gives these parties negotional power.

Little is known about Liang Long’s band before he came to Beijing in 2000. The personnel changes of the period between the first (2003) and second albums (2006) are easier to specify: next to Liang Long only Wu Zekun remained, and Wu is arguably the band member most on the periphery of the creational process. He didn’t attend the rehearsals I witnessed in 2007, only showing up for live shows to play embellishments and hurrying back to his paying job at a folk orchestra afterwards. Next to Liang Long, guitar player Wang Yuqi was the longest-standing band member of

<sup>115</sup> Xiao He, conversation, November 2006.

<sup>116</sup> Vitamin Creative Space 2010, their translation.

Second Hand Rose on the debut album. He explained that playing with Second Hand Rose between 2000 and 2005 was beneficial for his *guanxi* as performing artist and songwriter in later years.

Liang Long doesn't understand music. He provides the lyrics, but the music was composed by all of us together. We were very surprised when the album came out and it said: 'Words and music 詞曲 by Liang Long, arrangement 編曲 by Second Hand Rose. However, at the time Liang Long had a relationship with the female CEO of the record company, so we couldn't really say anything.

Second Hand Rose was on the verge of becoming a crash-hot band. However, because of these personal things it didn't work out that way. I was the last of the old band to leave. Basically because there was no musical progress, I had no real connection with the new members, especially the keyboard player [Zhu Qiwei], and finally also because of issues with Liang Long. The real reason for my departure is that Liang Long couldn't accept that anyone stood up against him.

It would have been better if Liang Long had operated like Xie Tianxiao. At least Xie Tianxiao is clear about his leadership, while maintaining an open ear to opinions of others. Liang Long tries hard to suggest a brotherly unity that actually masks manipulation. I heard Wu Zekun only got around two hundred RMB over the whole of 2006, and then Liang Long says: "We're buddies, why mention money?"<sup>117</sup>

The other band members on the debut album were established Beijing musicians. Bass player Chen Jing had played with Dou Wei, and drummer Zhang Yue with The Master Says. They joined the band in 2002 after Second Hand Rose gained something of a name on the live circuit and the experienced Beijinger Niu Jiawei had become their manager.

Wang Yuqi lacked affinity even with Beibei, who had joined the band as drummer after Zhang Yue left in 2004: "To Beibei playing in Second Hand Rose was just fun, he didn't care much about the conditions or prospects."<sup>118</sup> Beibei gained fame as a member of Cui Jian from the late 1990s onwards, and as studio musician.

When I joined Second Hand Rose I had just reached a level where I could participate intensively in arranging and recording. The songs would start with lyrics by Liang Long, he would sing them accompanying himself on the guitar. Then Yao Lan and I would work out most songs. I also recorded the drums, co-produced the album and even recorded some of the bass lines. The only demand was that the music would contain ethnic sounds, such as Two-Taking-Turns. I think the music has traditional elements, but also resists tradition because it seeks to surpass it.<sup>119</sup>

When the sales of Second Hand Rose's second album were disappointing, their Hong Kong record company Music Nation stopped investing time and money in them, without informing the band but also without releasing them from their obligations. By the time Second Hand Rose realized their situation, the only thing they could do was to continue playing live shows and rehearsing while refrain-

<sup>117</sup> Wang Yuqi, conversation, October 2007.

<sup>118</sup> Wang Yuqi, conversation, October 2007.

<sup>119</sup> Beibei, conversation, September 2007.

ing from recording until after the contract finished months later in the spring of 2008, lest the rights to the new material would fall to Music Nation. Additionally, like most bands and pop singers in China, Second Hand Rose had also signed a performance contract that entitled Music Nation to a substantial percentage of concert revenues. Wu Zekun's rumored wages of two hundred RMB in all of 2006 were partly due to endless division of the band's already modest income. However, for the most part of 2007, Second Hand Rose arranged their own shows, circumventing Music Nation, who didn't take them to task for it.<sup>120</sup>

Second Hand Rose has constantly struggled to secure their niche in the entertainment jungle, which has led to a number of notable adaptations. Firstly, next to being a passable bass player, Jiang Ningzhan was crucial in taking on some of the functions of manager, until he left the band in 2008. Jiang makes a living running the Chinese version of the musician magazine *Modern Player* 现代乐手 and organizing endorsement venues for instrument makers. These business activities and his membership of a well-known band are mutually beneficial, feeding into a large network.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, Liang Long explained that he doesn't want to become another aspiring rock star like the PRC pop-rock singer Xu Wei, but would like to develop into broader cultural areas by organizing multimedia projects, writing books and directing films.<sup>122</sup> The sampler *You in a Red Chamber, I Journey West* (2008), which Liang Long supervised, is a step in this direction, and the project was also coupled to an art exhibition. Second Hand Rose's 2010 album *Everybody Has a Lead Vocalist's Heart* 人人有赖主唱的心 also resembles a conceptual art project. The liner notes read:

Bands are never just one person. However, since Western rock was introduced to China, gradually an awkward situation has emerged in which lead vocalists are famous and the other musicians unknown. ... When manager Huang Liaoyuan is not recognized at the door; when guitar player Yao Lan angrily sees countless fans call Liang Long crash-hot; when bass player Li Zichang's name is repeatedly forgotten by most groupies; when drummer Sun Quan looks like an idol but cannot get his own fans; when folk instrumentalist Wu Zekun doubts whether he is truly part of Second Hand Rose: then these five comrades of Second Hand Rose decide they can't go on like this.

On the album, each of these people (including even Huang Liaoyuan, the manager) sings a cover version of a Chinese evergreen. Liang calls it "an internal sampler 内部合辑," and the album may well give outsiders the opposite impression of its explicit purpose. Rather than showing that everybody can sing, the album shows that, in the words of one shop owner, "still, Liang Long sings best."<sup>123</sup> Finally, the frequent reshuffling of band members, Liang's focus on multimedia projects



Illustration 5.16: Announcement of the presentation of Second Hand Rose's 2010 album *Everybody Has a Lead Vocalist's Heart* in Guangzhou.

<sup>120</sup> Conversation, Liang Long, June 2007 and Wang Yuqi, October 2007.

<sup>121</sup> Jiang Ningzhan, conversation, July 2007.

<sup>122</sup> Conversation, Liang Long, October 2007.

<sup>123</sup> Conversation, Free Sound 福聲, September 2010.

and the involvement of Huang Liaoyuan and Beibei, who resigned as a full member, but who said he would remain involved in writing and recording new songs, may move Second Hand Rose towards being what Capdeville-Zeng describes as an “open band” – a band lacking clear boundaries and performing with different members, depending on the circumstances.<sup>124</sup>

## §5 Concluding Remarks

I have argued that Chinese popular music comes into existence in the same way as cheese does – or tofu, for that matter. The process takes place within the milk chaosmos, in which curds coagulate and consolidate. Additionally, this process is spontaneous, immanent, inconspicuous and evolutionary. The disparate elements that reproduce, variate and select may have strongly diverging goals, such as making good music, changing the world, having fun and making money, while still contributing to the process. This renders it impossible to pinpoint a single or even a primary ‘creator.’

Everything in this chapter has happened in the folds. The figure of the fold, ‘grabbed’ from Deleuze and Guattari, offers an image of a world in which everything is connected but which is also full of inequality, uniqueness and violence. The rhythm that arises out of the symbiosis of Xiao He and Wang Fan with their respective electronic instruments; the proliferation and variation of labeled melodies and other *kata*, for instance in Second Hand Rose’s *MARRIAGE REVELATION*; the use of references to transform concepts into songs at the Wind Music and Big Circus companies; the interaction within the organic team that is Faye Wong; and the negotiations and specialization among indie companies and members of rock bands. All these concepts, sounds and people swim through the milk of this chapter.

There are many more participants in the production of Chinese popular music than I have been able to deal with here. In particular, the music business, government regulation and social and technical developments form entire strata that I have neglected. Yet the above analysis allows me to outline a few major trends.

Over the years, the production of music and stars has been divided over an expanding network of specialized organizations. The decline in economic profits in the industry due to China’s rampant illegal downloading has partly reversed this development. The industry rediscovered autonomous stars – singers and bands that can write music and need less tutoring.<sup>125</sup> Due to cheap equipment and easy (online) access to music, aspiring songwriters can create high-quality demos at home, making it less necessary to involve large numbers of people in the production of songs. Due to his use of technology, Xiao He can create without his band Glorious Pharmacy.

But does that mean he is more of a solipsist? Despite enabling people to connect less with others, technological developments also contribute to increasing connectivity, and the development of niche markets. Internet communities and karaoke are mass socio-technical developments that influence the shape of music directly. In South Korea and Japan, and to a lesser extent Taiwan and Hong Kong, karaoke accrues a growing percentage of the music industry’s income, and so does music for computer games and mobile phone ring tones. The influence of karaoke can be seen from the willingness of companies to invest in singable songs. Although Mainland China lacks a properly functioning monitoring institution, PRC companies also consider karaoke in selecting their main

<sup>124</sup> Capdeville-Zeng 2001:141-204.

<sup>125</sup> Dong Yun-chang, conversation, July 2007.

publicity songs. Faye Wong serves as a counter-example, since she has secured the right to select her own promotional songs and picks ones that are notoriously difficult to sing.<sup>126</sup>

Finally, in the PRC, Taiwan and other parts of Asia, governments have a tradition of participating in and/or interfering with cultural production, revealing their own agenda and its effects on the various aspects of the production process.<sup>127</sup> In the PRC the government ultimately owns all media outlets, including radio, TV and larger live venues. The complexity of PRC government of a vast and in some ways multi-layered and compartmentalized country offers negotiation space, for things like circumventing censorship and bargaining for reduced venue rental fees.<sup>128</sup> *Guanxi* are also crucial in securing commissions to write theme songs for state ceremonies and perform at national events. Whereas the state had a monopoly on cultural production in the 1970s, in the course of the 1990s it became an important commissioner. Whereas in the past the music for such large-scale events as the Beijing Olympics would have been composed by government departments, in 2008 they collaborated with Hong Kong and Taiwan stars such as Andy Lau and Jay Chou.<sup>129</sup>

These and many other issues require further investigation. Stopping here only proves that, as the Daoist Liezi writes, “there is no ultimate in the beginning or end of things” or, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari:<sup>130</sup>

*Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Susie Au, conversation, July 2007.

<sup>127</sup> Mittler 1997.

<sup>128</sup> De Kloet 2010:180-190.

<sup>129</sup> Fung 2003; 2007; 2008.

<sup>130</sup> Quoted in Stevenson 2006.

<sup>131</sup> Deleuze 1987:25.

# Conclusion: Voice and Persona

Beijing-based rocker X.T.X.'s song *GRANDFATHER* 爺爺 (2008) starts with an upbeat and rousing intro on a heavily distorted guitar. When the drums and bass lapse, X.T.X. sings a wordless melodic phrase of Peking Opera. Although the delivery is not nasal, the ornaments are instantly recognizable: “Aha-a-a a-ahaha . . .” The tempo slows down, and X.T.X.'s subsequent high “Ahh” marks the first note of the second measure, when bass, drums and distorted guitars re-enter, adding grandeur to the restrained, vibrato vocal sustain. The second phrase is just like the first, but now the second measure starts with a pause and then a tormented scream, after which the band enters in double time.

Next to the face, the voice is a defining aspect of personal identities, and even more of the persona of a singer. Etymologically, the Latin-derived word ‘persona’ is related to theatrical masks, *prosopon πρόσωπον* in Greek, through which (*per*) voices resound (*sonare*). I will use the concept of the voice to revisit some of my arguments, reflect on this study and suggest directions for further research. Voices assert the presence, the absence and the excess of identities.

## §1 Mouthpieces and Outcries

First, presence, especially that of the People. Nimrod Baranovitch opens *China's New Voices* (2003) with the voice as *vox populi*:

For close to three decades in China [i.e. the PRC] after 1949, one could hear in public a single voice, that of the party-state ... the introduction of new, simple, and low-cost technologies, like cassette and video recording ... enabled many heretofore voiceless people to speak publicly in new voices and to articulate new subjectivities. ... [in the 1980s] people started to speak publicly in voices that did not always correspond to the voice of the state.<sup>1</sup>

On one end of the dichotomy are the state's mouthpieces. The bel canto and official folk singing styles of Song Zuying and others perform an eternally scientifically advancing collective. “These singing styles and the abundant use of chorusses render the singers relatively anonymous.”<sup>2</sup>

On the other end of the dichotomy lies the outcry. *Nahan* 吶喊, ‘outcry,’ argues Baranovitch, “encapsulates the wide spectrum of feelings that were articulated in rock

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<sup>1</sup> Baranovitch 2003: 1, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Baranovitch 2003: 206.

songs during the late 1980s and early 1990s.”<sup>3</sup> *Nahan* is the title of a famous collection of short stories (1923) by Lu Xun, translated into English as *A Call to Arms*.<sup>4</sup> The word also features prominently in the titles of a number of publications on the advent of rock in China.<sup>5</sup>

Musically, since 1986, Teng Ge'er and Cui Jian have introduced into popular music vocal techniques derived from Mongolian and Northwest Chinese folk songs, known as 'shout-singing' 喊唱.<sup>6</sup> Rather than shouting at the top of their voices, Teng, Cui and more recently Dolan restrain their voices in the back of their throats, creating a typical rasp. These voices combine folk traditions with uncouth individualism and position this amalgam as the raw and authentic Chinese nation. In the 1990s, metal band Tang Dynasty continued this strand: their signature song RETURNING IN DREAMS TO TANG DYNASTY (1992) contains both Peking Opera delivery and piercing, falsetto screams. X.T.X.'s GRANDFATHER serves as a pinnacle of this lineage of sinified rock, because of the brevity and wordlessness of its performance of a frustrated identity entangled in Chineseness.

Baranovitch associates the outcry with rebelliousness and authenticity, reiterating what I described in chapter 2 as the rock mythology, following De Kloet. To be sure, *China's New Voices* tries to “move beyond the well-established fixed and binary hierarchies of dominance and subordination” and “show how general culture in China today is constructed through constant and complex negotiation between multiple forces.”<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Baranovitch posits rock in the camp of political opposition, albeit sometimes against Western (cultural) imperialism, Han Chinese ethnic intolerance or male chauvinism, rather than the Chinese state. In contrast to these outcries and the anti-establishment noisiness of the Underground, Qiu Ye of The Master Says and Liang Long of Second Hand Rose hardly ever sing in a raw, throaty voice – in the case of the latter, only UNOFFICIAL HISTORY (2009) contains a few guttural sounds mixed into the background. Sonically, the noisiness of Second Hand Rose lies rather in its distortion guitars, on top of which Liang's vocal delivery is inspired by pop music and Northeast-Chinese Two-Taking-Turns, which favor catchy melodies, clear articulation and slightly nasal delivery. Additionally, Liang is sometimes supported by female voices that do not sound all that different from Song Zuying, and by comically high sounds produced by flutist Wu Zekun on wind instruments. Both of these can be heard in AMNESTY 招安, whose lyrics question the glorification of

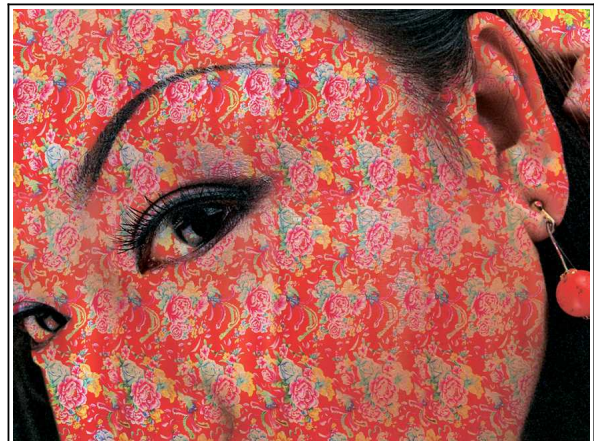


Illustration 6.1: Vocalist Liang Long on a promotional picture of Second Hand Rose.

<sup>3</sup> Baranovitch 2003: 39.

<sup>4</sup> Lu 2000, cf. Groenewegen 2005: 19.

<sup>5</sup> Zhao 1994; Lu 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Guo 2007: 180, Zhang 2008a: 137-138.

<sup>7</sup> Baranovitch 2003: 8, 9.

persevering under duress, a common injunction in Chinese culture, including rock. Wu's squeaks push this critique into ridicule. In other words, it is also in their use of the voice that Second Hand Rose challenge the rock mythology, and the dichotomy it presupposes: between state and People, between mouthpiece and outcry. They were the first band that rendered it ideologically defensible to cooperate with commerce and claim social relevance at the same time.

## §2 Ventriloquism

The official folk singing style, Peking Opera and the vocal delivery of sinified rock articulate connections between Chinese speakers and the Chinese nation. Put differently, through performance these voices render the nation present. At a *xianchang* 現場 'performance, show, site of emergence,' a jazz or punk singer also establishes presence, persuading the audience that this interpellation deserves response and empathy. Acoustic ecology projects such as *Sound and the City* (2007) reconnect people with their sonic environment. In many respects Xiao He's music furthers these efforts, but it also questions their premises. Xiao He often ridicules clichés, thereby challenging the naturalness of musical representations of the nation, the diva or the city. In other words, Xiao He celebrates liveness but disavows presence.

For instance, CD 1 of *The Performance of Identity* (2009) consists of studio improvisations. Like 'urban folk,' studio improvisation may appear to be an oxymoron. In the studio sounds are garbled, sliced and rearranged, and presence becomes dispersed and elusive. At best it is the presence of a telephone conversation: audibly mediated and disembodied, but still recognizable and metonymic for the interlocutor. By contrast, live shows, and especially improvisation, assert presence by dramatically displaying one or more identifiable, physical bodies that produce sounds there and then, through physical activity. On *The Performance of Identity*, Xiao He resolves this tension by limiting himself to one guitar and one voice, and by abandoning elaborate studio techniques and sound effects.

The album opens with gurgling, barely recognizable as a voice, and contains wailing, Peking Opera imitations, ultra-low overtone singing and heterophony (where voice and guitar simultaneously produce almost similar melodies). It is reminiscent of live shows, during which Xiao He's singing is extremely physical. His face frequently turns red and veins swell up on his throat as he sustains the high shrieks, stutters or coughs. And then he taps the button of his loop station, and records a similar scream on top of the previous one, for example towards the end of the song HEI HEI on the second, live-recorded CD. Because the Loop Station repeats the music, Xiao He can focus on his vocal delivery. He adds another odd vocal line, and another, until we hear ten Xiao He's, but see only one on stage. It becomes unclear which sound is live and which was live a few moments ago, but now comes out of a digital device. The tapestry becomes increasingly intense, not to say insane. Mladen Dolar argues in *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006):



*Illustration 6.2: Xiao He during the presentation of The Performance of Identity in D-22.*

Every emission of the voice is by its very essence *ventriloquism*. ... the voice comes from inside the body, the belly, the stomach—from something incompatible with and irreducible to the activity of the mouth. The fact that we see the aperture does not demystify the voice; on the contrary, it enhances the enigma ... The voice, by being so ephemeral, transient, incorporeal, ethereal, presents for that very reason the body at its quintessential, the hidden bodily treasure

beyond the visible envelope, the interior “real” body, unique and intimate, and at the same time it seems to present more than the mere body ... the voice carried by breath points to the soul irreducible to the body.<sup>8</sup>

Dolar’s psychoanalytical framework can also be related to Xiao He’s ‘bird language,’ which then foregrounds the unintelligible materiality of pre- or extra-linguistic desires, or *jouissance*. In such performances, Xiao He celebrates liveness and spontaneity, but does not authenticate these with his own body or identity. His shows are not about the presence of a unified subject that is engaging in self-expression. Rather, they show the absence of anything unifying, let alone a self. If we peel off the different layers and frames of subjectivity like masks or clothes, we find not a naked face or body, but nothing.

### §3 Overdubbing

Pop music’s answer to the voice’s potential signification of lack is to reconnect it to singers. Based on extensive fieldwork in the French record industry, Antoine Hennion wrote in 1981:

When looking for new singers, producers do not judge a candidate by his repertoire ... What they try to recognize first and foremost, and to single out wherever possible, is a ‘voice.’ That voice, as they conceive it, is from the start an element with a double meaning, physiological and psychological. It will be the basis for

<sup>8</sup> Dolar 2006: 70-71.

the relationship which must be established between the singer's persona and his songs. Having a 'voice' in pop music terms does not mean possessing a vocal technique or systematically mastering one's vocal capacities. Instead, a voice is an indication of one's personality.<sup>9</sup>

Hennion positions the voice as a sign of physical and psychic presence. The molding of singers into stereotypes is the result of building images, repertoires and life stories around the "infinite nuances of a particular voice":

The voice is less deceptive than the physical appearance, more revealing of the true personality, cannot be manipulated at will as easily as can the external appearance.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, in his chapter on the voice in *Performing Rites*, Simon Frith starts by establishing voice as signature: "We immediately know who's speaking."<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, he also shows that this connection of voice and singer raises a different issue, namely, that of multivocality. Although Frith never questions the presence of a person behind the voice ("it's the singer's, stupid!"), he does argue that the character of a lyric and the style of a composer may have equally strong presences. Audiences enjoy hearing a song's persona and a star's persona simultaneously, for instance in cross-gender covers of well-known love songs.<sup>12</sup>

Discussions of the tension between composer and singer in opera have explored music's excess of identities. Edward Cone's *The Composer's Voice* (1974) stresses the centrality of the composer, which Carolyn Abbate challenges in *Unsung Voices* (1991):

Music's voices ... manifest themselves ... as different *kinds* or modes of music that inhabit a single work. They are not uncovered by analyses that assume all music in a given work is stylistically or technically identical, originating from a single source in "the Composer."<sup>13</sup>

Rather than arguing that the singer is dominant, Abbate argues for opera's multiplicity, an argument that can be extended to Chinese popular music.<sup>14</sup> De Kloet, building on Bakhtin, argues that Chinese pop "unfolds the *heteroglossia* of everyday life," through its multivocality, which offers extraordinary and ambiguous sites for identity games, for example through karaoke.<sup>15</sup> As argued in chapters 4 and especially 5 of this study, in Faye

<sup>9</sup> Hennion 1983: 182.

<sup>10</sup> Hennion 1983: 183.

<sup>11</sup> Frith 1996: 184.

<sup>12</sup> Frith 1996: 199.

<sup>13</sup> Abbate 1991:12.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Duncan 2004; Middleton 2006:91-98.

<sup>15</sup> De Kloet 2010:131, 137. Cf. Fung 2009

Wong there is a (productive) tension between environmental influences, the collectivity of a (production) team and the individuality of the singer. “In the final analysis clips are about the projection of a self, the self of the star. It’s about exploring her fantasy, or my fantasy about her,” says MTV director Susie Au.<sup>16</sup> This multiplicity is also played out in Wong’s voice, through vocal techniques, sound effects and backing vocals.

The PRC critic Wang Xiaofeng writes in “Who Made Faye Wong” 誰製造了王菲 (2010):

Faye Wong’s voice had been weak in the higher registers, as the song NO REGRETS 執迷不悔 (1993FEB) makes abundantly clear. Therefore Wong smartly imitated the singing style of the female vocalists of the Cranberries, Cocteau Twins and others. This kind of embellished falsetto not only circumvented her weakness, it also made her new and unique. At the time, even in Hong Kong, how many people knew Björk, the Cranberries, Tori Amos or Cocteau Twins? But her imitation was one step ahead and fulfilled her individuality and [her role as] symbol.<sup>17</sup>

Whether Wong employs falsetto is open to debate. At least, her vocal lines contain many minute and high ornaments, and at times they seem to break, especially on the album *Impatience* (1996), where producer Zhang Yadong rendered them distant and ephemeral. In other songs, Faye Wong employs singing techniques reminiscent of opera, such as vibrato and a modest bel canto. FACE (1998) opposes Wong’s operatic voice in the verse, to a more nasal voice in the rocky chorus. Towards the end of the song the two voices collide, multiply and ascend, resulting in reverberating noise in which the lyrics are barely audible: “I didn’t say anything.”

In a few songs Faye Wong’s voice is overtly manipulated. After an intro of violins and heavy, computer-generated beats, Wong sings the first, tranquil chorus of IDIOTS (2001OCT) with a light distortion. In the bridge her delivery is clear, but slightly nasal, and gates are used to prepare the blending of her voice into the sound of an erhu. This two-stringed Chinese fiddle takes over the main melody, repeating it with the laid-back timing usually reserved for vocal delivery. During the finale of the song, the erhu does not return, but Faye Wong’s voice mimics its earlier occurrence.

However, most of the time sound effects don’t embed Wong in tradition but conversely disembodiment her voice: think of the digitalized metallic effect created with the software program Autotune in SMOKE 煙 (2003), or the use of the octaver that transforms the scant words of the robotic stewardess she plays in Wong Kar-Wai’s science fiction film 2046 (2005). This disembodiment is enhanced by the fact that Faye Wong records almost all of her backing vocals herself. From early examples such as SEDUCE ME 誘惑我 (1993SEP) onwards, it seems impossible to construct one singular body behind most of her music. In songs such as SPLIT 分裂 (1996) these voices even seem to engage in a duet,

<sup>16</sup> Susie Au, conversation, July 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Wang 2010.

which, like the layered improvisations and role-playing of Xiao He, present excess and surplus rather than restraint and lack.

However, rather than rendering the make-believe fantasy unsustainable, in the case of Faye Wong this excess enables desire and idolization. Also the duality of an inner, innocent “Ah Faye” protected by a distant “Faye Wong,” does not render her incredible to her fans, not only because Faye Wong’s body and voice link these performances together, but also because it helps suggesting an alluring alternative or virtual universe. In *2046*, it is only long after being embraced that Faye Wong’s character first reveals emotion: she sheds a single, estheticized tear. Wong’s *ASURA* (2000) is the penultimate musical example of the interplay of presence, absence and excess, because its sighed *haya*’s – intimately low and physically close but eternally out of reach – are its de facto chorus, to which the dubbed lyrics are accompaniment.

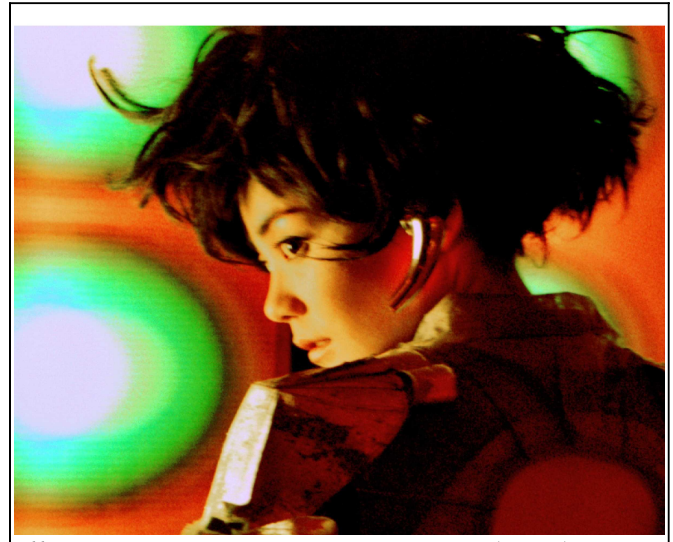


Illustration 6.3: Faye Wong in *2046* (2005).

## §4 Middle Voice

In songs such as Second Hand Rose’s *AMNESTY*, Xiao He’s *HEI HEI* or Faye Wong’s *ASURA*, the voice may become autonomous, “a voice-object and the sole center for the listener’s attention,” in Abbate’s words.<sup>18</sup> In general, singing is not primarily about *who* says *what*, which Chion calls causal and semantic listening, respectively, of the type one might find in a courtroom. It is more about the enigmatic *how*, which requires reduced listening, listening to sound as the object to be observed rather than a vehicle for something else. This also helps to explain why people listen to music over and over again, long after it can be expected to yield new paraphrasable information.

The voice can be a partial object, and yet I agree with Tia DeNora, who argues that:

Exclusive focus on the music itself is problematic ... For the work ‘itself’ cannot be specified; it is anything, everything, nothing. The social identity of the work – like all social identities – emerges from its interaction and juxtaposition to others, people and things. ... actors often erase the work they do of configuring objects and their social implications. Indeed, it would seem to be part of the natural attitude ... to ‘forget’, paraphrasing Marx, that we are oppressed by the things we have helped to produce. This ‘forgetting’ is the cognitive practice of reification.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Abbate 1991:10. Cf. Middleton 253-255.

<sup>19</sup> DeNora 2000:27, 31, 40.

Throughout this study I have invested the music ‘itself’ with agency. Grammatically, I have described music by using the middle voice, which positions it in between passive and active. Rather than saying “sinified rock is performed,” I have framed music as subject (“sinified rock performs the nation” or “music performs identity”) and used verbs reflexively (“sinified rock performs itself” or “music’s voices manifest themselves”). Clearly, such phrasings do not present music as passive, but neither is music straightforwardly active, simply because it cannot emerge and act of its own accord. In other words, the middle voice positions music as an actor – meaning, an entity taking action – whose agency becomes apparent through the actions of others in the network, such as human beings. The voice is a mediator, not an intermediary, borrowing this distinction from Bruno Latour:

An *intermediary*, in my vocabulary, is what transports meaning or force without transformation: defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs. For all practical purposes, an intermediary can be taken not only as a black box, but also as a black box counting for one, even if it is internally made of many parts. *Mediators*, on the other hand, cannot be counted as just one: they might count for one, for nothing, for several, or for infinity. Their input is never a good predictor of their output; their specificity has to be taken into account every time. Mediators transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry.<sup>20</sup>

Within the networks Latour and DeNora describe, technological objects such as music are co-producers that affect possible outcomes.<sup>21</sup> In psychoanalytical terms, we may call imbuing the voice with agency transference. People transfer or project their desire onto fetishes, idols and fantasy objects. Precisely because of this mechanism, these objects of desire have tremendous influence, effectively hailing the subject into existence.<sup>22</sup>

This brings me to my next point. Although actor-network theory and psychoanalysis seem to agree that objects may influence human actions and that objects can hence be seen as having a certain degree of agency, nevertheless the explanations and general approaches these theories offer are hugely different. These differences are starkest in actor-network theory’s positing of an objective reality (revealing its roots in the social sciences and its engineering) versus psychoanalysis’s focus on subjective narratives (especially as redefined as an interpretative discourse in the humanities). Despite these differences, most of the theoretical thrust of these pages has been inspired by these two tradi-

<sup>20</sup> Latour 2005:39.

<sup>21</sup> Latour 2005:63-86.

<sup>22</sup> Through the “Che Vuoi?” cf. Žižek 1989:87-128; Middleton 2006:227-246. “Moreover, the incentive does not originate from the audience, but from the performance. The performance ‘teaches us how to desire’ (Žižek 1998:191. Cf. Fiennes 2006).” See also Žižek 1989:34: “they no longer believe, but the things themselves believe for them.”

tions. I have mobilized *fantasy*, *network* and other concepts whenever they had explanatory value, and without considering the incompatibilities between the traditions that defined them. My mediations can only be temporary and site-specific.

## §5 Call and Response

As to future research, actor-network theory provides a framework for investigating the productive interaction of technology, economy and society, or rather: instruments, money and people. These investigations could address the Chinese music industry as a whole, or shed light on specific kinds of musicking such as karaoke, disco/clubs, sound ecology, video game music and online celebrity culture. In all of these, issues of identification, fantasy and desire remain important, but the focus is on collective connectedness and *inter-esse* rather than individual subjectivity. Such research would ideally include more fieldwork and surveys of audience participation than I have been able to conduct for this book.

In terms of geography, future projects could explore flows throughout Asia. Ideally, the Inter-Asian Study of Popular Music Group could organize a collective project to write a transnational history of Asian popular music, with the trend-setting pop industries of South Korea, Japan and possibly Southeast Asian nations studied alongside and interacting with Chinese-speaking regions such as the PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. If such projects seem too utopian, a start could be made by comparing the pop industries that emerged in Shanghai, Seoul and Tokyo in the 1930s around jazz, gramophones and globalizing record companies; or the influence of rock bars and radio stations catering to American soldiers in South Korea, Okinawa, Taiwan and the Philippines during the Vietnam war. Additionally, it is striking that there is virtually no serious research on someone as influential as Teresa Teng, who could fruitfully be compared to other artists with regional and transnational appeal, such as Shirley Yamaguchi, Miyuki Nakajima, Jay Chou and Rain.

Next to such attempts at grand, transnational histories of pop in Asia, projects that focus on, say, music cultures in villages or townships in Hunan, Yunnan or Gansu provinces would be welcome, as they would reveal a different kind of connectedness, with social institutions, folk music, and daily life. They would also challenge the idea of Chinese popular music as a monolith that is produced by metropolises and follows a clearly definable mainstream. Finally, next to or combined with strictly musicological projects, we need to learn more about the ways in which pop stardom interlinks cinema, music, the media and fans, and about the ways in which music functions in power relations, including government policy, copyright law enforcement, state-sponsored festivals and censorship. Amidst these and many other possible lines of investigation, I hope to have offered useful vantage points. “Aha-a-a a-ahaha . . .”

13 <sup>th</sup> Month (Shisanyue) 十三月
43 Chang (Zhang Sishisan) 張四十三
A-mei (A Mei) 阿妹 aka Chang Hui-mei
ABU(Yatai Jinzheng Liuxingqu Chuangzuo Dasai) 亞太金箏流行曲創作大賽
Ai Jing 艾敬
Ai Weiwei 艾未未
Alfa Music (Aerfa Yinyue) 阿爾發音樂
Annie (Luo Anni) 羅恩妮
Asano, Tadanobu (Qianye Zhongxin) 淺野忠信
Atom (A Tongmu) 阿童木
Au, Susie (Qu Xue'er) 區雪兒
AuYung Fei-fei (Ouyang Feifei) 歐陽菲菲
Bai Guang 白光
Bak Sheut Sin (Bai Xueshan) 白雪仙
Bee, Kenny (Zhong Zhentao) 鐘鎮濤
Beibei 貝貝 aka Wu Yonghuan 武勇恆
Beijing Exhibition Center (Beijing Zhanlanguan Juchang) 北京展覽館劇場
Bian Yuan 边远
Big Circus (Da Maxituan) 大馬戲團
Black Panther (Hei Bao) 黑豹
Boredom Contingent (Wuliao Jundui) 無聊軍隊
Brain Failure (Naozuo) 腦濁
Bu Yi 布衣
Cao Fei 曹斐
Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹
Carol Chu (Zhu Liqian) 朱麗倩
Chan, Adrian (Chen Weiwen) 陳偉文
Chan, Danny (Chen Baiqiang) 陳百强
Chan, Katie (Chen Jiaying) 陳家瑛
Chan, Peter (Chen Kexing) 陳可辛
Chan, Sandee (Chen Shanni) 陳珊妮
Chan, Tomas
Chang Chao-wei (Zhang Zhaowei) 張釗維
Chang Hui-mei (Zhang Huimei) 張惠妹 aka A-mei
Chang, Deserts (Zhang Xuan) 張懸
Chang, Grace (Ge Lan) 葛蘭
Chang, Jeff (Zhang Xinzhe) 張信哲
Chao, Celine
Chen Dili 陳底裏
Chen Fenlan 陳芬蘭
Chen Jiantian 陳建添
Chen Jing 陳勁
Chen Kaige 陳凱歌
Chen Laolian 陈老莲 aka Chen Hongshou 陳洪綬
Chen Qigang 陳其鋼
Chen Shui-bian 陳水扁
Chen Xiaobao 陳少寶
Chen, Thomas

Cheng Lin 程琳
Cheng, Ronald (Zheng Zhongji) 鄭中基
Cheng, Sammi (Zheng Xiuwen) 鄭秀文
Cheung, Cecilia (Zhang Baizhi) 張柏芝
Cheung, Jacky (Zhang Xueyou) 張學友
Cheung, Leslie (Zhang Guorong) 張國榮
Cheung, Mabel (Zhang Wanting) 張婉婷
Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) 蔣介石
Chin, Chyi (Qi Qin) 齊秦
China Conservatory (Zhongguo Yinyue Xueyuan) 中國音樂學院
Chinese Popular Song Award (Zhongguo Liuxing Gequ Paihangbang) 中國流行歌曲排行榜
Cho, Jason (Cai Decai) 蔡德才
Chou Ch'ien-i (Zhou Qianyi) 周倩漪
Chou Wen-chung (Zhou Wenzhong) 周文中
Chou, Jay (Zhou Jielun) 周杰倫
Chou, Where (Zhou Hui) 周蕙
Chow Yiufai (Zhou Yaohui) 周耀輝
Chow, Stephen (Zhou Xingchi) 周星馳
Chua, Tanya (Cai Jianya) 蔡健雅
Chyi Yu (Qi Yu) 齊豫
Cinepoly (Xin Yi Bao) 新藝寶
Cobra (Yanjingshe) 眼鏡蛇
Cola King (Kele Wang) 可樂王 aka Dan Zhenxing 詹振興
Cui Jian 崔健
Dai Sicong 戴思聰
Daomadan 刀馬旦
Diaz, Romeo (Dai Yumin) 戴樂民
Dike Niuzai 迪克牛仔
Ding Wu 丁武
DogG (Dazhi) 大支
Dolan (Dao Lang) 刀郎
Dollar (Da Le) 大樂
Dong Music (Dong Yue) 東樂
Dong Yun-chang (Dong Yunchang) 董運昌
Dongzi 冬子 aka Li Dong 李東
Dos Kolegas (Liangge Haopengyou) 兩個好朋友
Dou Wei 竇唯
Dou Ying 竇穎
Du Fu 杜甫
Duan, Sam
Duskgood, Civil and King (Mu Liang Wen Wang) 暮良文王
E (yi) 譯
Ear Slap (Erguang) 耳光
Fan, Mavis (Fan Xiaoxuan) 范曉萱
Fang, Vincent (Fang Wenshan) 方文山
Feng Jiangzhou 豐江舟
Feng Xiaogang 馮小剛

Fong, Kahlil (Fang Datong) 方大同
Fung, Helen (Feng Haining) 冯海宁
Gao Fei 高飛
Gao Xin 高新
Gaybird (Liang Jijue) 梁基爵
Ge Ridai 戈日泰
Global Sinophone Music Charts (Quanqiu Huayu Yinyuebang) 全球華語音樂榜
Glorious Pharmacy (Meihao Yaodian) 美好藥店
Gold-Worshipping Girls (Baijin Xiaojie) 拜金小姐
Golden Melody Awards (Jinqujiang) 金曲獎
Great Earth (Da Di) 大地
Gu Cheng 顧城
Gu Jianfen 谷建芬
Gu Jiegang 顧頤剛
Guo Degang 郭德綱
Guo Jian 國圀
Guo Long 郭龍
Guo Wenjing 郭文景
Han Hong 韓紅 aka Ingdzin Dolma
Han Tang (Han Tang) 漢唐
Hanggai 杭蓋
Hao Yun 郝云
Hark, Tsui (Xu Ke) 徐克
He Guofeng 何國鋒 aka Xiao He 小河
He Xiaoyu 和小宇
He Xuntian 何訓田
He Yong 何勇
Hirayasu, Takashi (Ping'an Long) 平安隆
Hitlike (Zhang Liming) 張立明
Hohaiyan Rock Festival (Haiyang Yinyueji) 海洋音樂祭
Hong Qi 洪启
Hou Baolin 侯寶林
Hou Hsiao-Hsien (Hou Xiaoxian) 侯孝賢
Hou Te-chien (Hou Dejian) 侯德健
Hou Yao 侯耀
Hsin, Winnie (Xin Xiaoqi) 辛曉琪
Hu Mage 胡嗎個
Hu, King (Hu Jinqun) 胡金銓
Huang Liaoyuan 黃燎原
Huang Ting 黃婷
Huang Xiaomao 黃曉茂
Huang Xiaoyang 黃曉陽
Huang, Tracy (Huang Yingying) 黃鶯鶯
Hui, Michael (Xu Guanwen) 許冠文
Hui, Sam (Xu Guanjie) 許冠傑
IZ (Jiaoyin) 腳印
Jade Solid Gold Best Ten Songs (Shida Jingge Jinqu Banjiang Dianli) 十大勁歌金曲頒獎典禮

Jia Zhang-ke (Jia Zhangke) 賈樟柯
Jiang Ningzhan 蔣寧湛
Jiang Qing 江青
Jiang Xi 姜昕
Jiang Zemin 江澤民
Jianghu 江湖
Jiangjinjiu 疆進酒
Jin Yong 金庸 aka Cha, Louis (Cha Liangyong) 查良鏞
Jin Zhaojun 金兆鈞
Jing Tian 景甜
Joker (Zhi Zunbao) 至尊寶
Kai Shuo 凱碩
Kang He 康赫
Kang Mao 抗貓
Keneshiro, Takeshi (Jincheng Wu) 金城武
Kimbo (Hu Defu) 胡德夫
Kong, C.Y. (Jiang Zhiren) 江志仁
Kunihiko, Matsuo (Songwei Bangyan) 松尾邦彦
Kuo, Kaiser (Guo Yiguang) 郭怡廣
Kwan, Stanley (Guan Jinpeng) 關錦鵬
Kwan, Titi
Kwok, Aaron (Guo Fucheng) 郭富城
Lai, Leon (Li Ming) 黎明
Lam Chik (Lin Xi) 林夕 aka Liang Weiwen 梁偉文
Lam, Chet (Lin Yifeng) 林一峰
Lam, George (Lin Zixiang) 林子祥
Lam, Sandy (Lin Yilian) 林憶蓮
Lao Lang 老狼 aka Wang Yang 王陽
Lao She 老舍 aka Shu Qingchun 舒慶春
Lau, Andy (Liu Dehua) 劉德華
Lau, Jeffrey (Liu Zhenwei) 劉鎮偉
Lau, Shun (Liu Xun) 劉洵
Lau, Wai Keung (Liu Weiqiang) 劉偉強
Lee, Ang (Li An) 李安
Lee, Ben
Lee, Chris (Li Yuchun) 李宇春
Lee, Dick (Li Diwen) 李迪文
Lee, Jonathan (Li Zongsheng) 李宗盛
Lee, Lilian (Li Bihua) 李碧華
Lee, Veronica (Li Duanxian) 李端嫻 aka Veegay
Leong, Alvin (Liang Rongjun) 梁榮駿
Leong, Fish (Liang Jingru) 梁靜茹 aka Leong Chui Pen 梁翠萍
Leung, Kubert (Liang Qiaobai) 梁翹柏
Leung, Tony (Liang Chaowei) 梁朝偉
Li Fei 李菲
Li Guyi 李谷一
Li Jinhui 黎錦暉
Li Jinxi 黎錦熙

Li Kui 李逵
Li Liuyi 李六乙
Li Minghui 黎明暉
Li Ronghao 李榮浩
Li Shuang-Tse (Li Shuangze) 李雙澤
Li Tieqiao 李鐵橋
Li Wenkuan 李文寬
Li Xianglan 李香蘭 aka Shirley Yamaguchi, aka Yamaguchi Yoshiko
Li Ya 黎亞
Li Yapeng 李亞鵬
Li Yawei 李亞偉
Li Yinhe 李銀河
Li Yu 李煜
Li Zhanyang 李占洋
Li Zhao 李昭
Li Zhi 李志
Li Ziqiang 李自強
Liang Long 梁龍
Liang Qichao 梁啟超
Liang Yiyuan 梁奕源
Lin Sheng-xiang (Lin Shengxiang) 林生祥
Linfair Records (Fumao Changpian) 福茂唱片
Liquid Oxygen Can (Yeyang Guantou) 液氧罐頭
Liu Guanlin 劉冠霖
Liu Juanjuan 劉娟娟
Liu Liu 刘流
Liu Xiaobo 劉曉波
Lo Ta-yu (Luo Dayou) 羅大佑
Lolo (LuoLuo) 偶偶
Lotus (Lianhua) 蓮花
Lou Ye 婁燁
Lu Chen 陸晨
Lu Xun 魯迅
Lu Zhongqiang 卢中强
Lu, Annette (Lü Xiulian) 吕秀莲
Ma Tiao 馬條
Ma, Yo-Yo (Ma Youyou) 馬友友
Madman (Chiren) 痴人
Magic Stone (Mo Yan) 魔岩
Maybe Folk (Ma Er Qu) 馬兒曲
Maybe Mars (Bing Ma Si) 兵馬司
Meng Jun 孟軍
Midi Modern Music Festival (Midi Xiandai Yinyuejie) 迷笛現代音樂節
Miserable Faith (Tongkude Xinyang) 痛苦的信仰
Modern Sky (Modeng Tiankong) 摩登天空
Mok, Karen (Mo Wenwei) 莫文蔚
Moo, Eric (Wu Qixian) 巫啟賢
Mui, Anita (Mei Yanfang) 梅艷芳
Muma 木馬

Music Nation (Da Guo) 大國
Nakajima, Miyuki 中島みゆき aka Zhongdao Meixue 中島美雪
Nameless Highground (Wuming Gaodi) 無名高地
Neo-folkfestival (Xin Minyao Yinyuejie) 新民謠音樂節
New Get Lucky (Xin Haoyun) 新豪運
New Pants (Xin Kuzi) 新褲子
Nie Er 聶耳
Nishijima Kazuhiro (Xidao Qianbo) 西島千博
Niu Jiawei 牛嘉偉
Ohtake, Ken (Dazhu Yan) 大竹研
Overload (Chaozai) 超載
Ozu Yasujiro (Xiaoliu Anerlang) 小津 安二郎
Pan, Rebecca (Pan Dihua) 潘迪華
Panai (Banai) 巴奈 aka Ku Sui 庫穗
Pang Kuan 龐寬
Pau-dull (Yongshi) 勇士 aka Chen Jiannian 陳建年
Peng Liyuan 彭麗媛
Peng, Millionaire (Peng Lei) 彭磊
People Mountain People Sea (Ren Shan Ren Hai) 人山人海
Pu Shu 樸樹
Pu Songling 蒲松齡
Punk God (Pan Gu) 盤古
Qiu Ye 秋野
Rao Shou-rong (Yao Surong) 姚蘇蓉
River Bar (He Jiuba) 河酒吧
Rock Records (Gunshi Changpian) 滾石唱片
Sa Dingding 薩頂頂
San, Alex
Scream Bar (Haojiao Julebu) 嚎叫俱樂部
Scream Records (Haojiao Changpian) 嚎叫唱片
Second Hand Rose (Ershou Meigui) 二手玫瑰
Shan Ren 山人
Shanshui 山水
Shen Lihui 沈黎暉
So Dark Green 苏打绿
Sober 清醒
Song Dandan 宋丹丹
Song Zuying 宋祖英
Soong, James Chu-yu (Song Chuyu) 宋楚瑜
Sounding Beijing (Beijing Shengna) 北京聲納
South City Johns (Nancheng Erge) 南城二哥
StarLive (Xingguang Xianchang) 星光現場
Su Lai 蘇來
Su Shi 蘇軾 aka Su Dongpo 蘇東坡
Su Yang 蘇陽
Sun Mengjin 孫孟晉
Sun Yizhen 孫儀填

Taihe Rye (Taihe Maitian) 太合麥田
Tam, Alan (Tan Yonglin) 譚詠麟
Tam, Roman (Luo Wen) 羅文
Tan Dun 譚盾
Tan Yizhe 譚伊哲
Tang Dynasty (Tang Chao) 唐朝
Tank (Lu Jianzhong) 呂建中
Tao, David (Tao Zhe) 陶喆
Tat Ming Pair (Daming Yipai) 達明一派
TCM (Jiaotou) 角頭
Teng Ge'er 騰格爾
Teng, Teresa (Deng Lijun) 鄧麗君
The Downtown Johns (Nancheng Erge) 南城二 哥
The Fly (Cangyin) 蒼蠅
The Master Says (Ziyue) 子曰
The Other Two Comrades (Lingwai Liangwei Tongzhi) 另外兩位同志
Tian Dongjun 田東軍
Tian, Hebe (Tian Fuzhen) 田馥甄
Tongue (Shetou) 舌頭
Top 10 Golden Songs Award (Shida Zhongwen Jinqu Banjiang Yinyuehui) 十大中文金曲頒獎 音樂會
Top Chinese Music Chart Awards (Yinyue Fengyunbang) 音樂風雲榜
Top Floor Circus (Dingloude Maxituan) 頂樓的 馬戲團
Tsai Chin (Cai Qin) 蔡琴
Tsai Ming-liang (Cai Mingliang) 蔡明亮
Tse, Nicolas (Xie Tianfeng) 謝霆鋒
Tseten Dolma (Caidan Zhuoma) 才旦卓瑪
Tung Rung-sen (Dong Rongsen) 董榕森
Twelve Girls Band (Nüzi Shier Yuefang) 女子 十二樂坊
Tzeng Huoy-jia (Zeng Huijia) 曾慧佳
Ukiyo-e (Fu Shi Hui) 浮世繪
Vegetarian Fish (Chi Caode Yu) 吃草的魚
Wan Xiaoli 萬曉利
Wang Changcun 王長存
Wang Di 王迪
Wang Fan 王凡
Wang Jingwen 王靖雯 aka Faye Wong
Wang Juan 王娟
Wang Leehom (Wang Lihong) 王力宏
Wang Lei 王磊
Wang Luobin 王洛賓
Wang Renmei 王人美
Wang Shifu 王實甫
Wang Shuo 王朔
Wang Xiaofang 王曉芳
Wang Xiaojing 王曉京
Wang Xiaoxin 王曉鑫

Wang Yong 王勇
Wang Yuelun 王岳倫
Wang Yuqi 王鈺棋
Wang, Joanna (Wang Ruolin) 王若琳
Waterland Kwanyin (Shuilu Guanyin) 水陸觀 音
Wei Wei 韋唯
Wen Jiabao 溫家寶
Wen Wu 文斌
Weng Ching-Hsi (Weng Qingxi) 翁清溪
Wild Children (Ye Haizi) 野孩子
Wind Music (Fengchao Changpian) 風潮唱片
Wing Hang (Yonghuan) 永恆
Wong Allow (Wang Yi) 王翊
Wong Kar-wai (Wang Jiawei) 王家衛
Wong, Anthony (Huang Yaoming) 黃耀明
Wong, Elaine
Wong, Faye (Wang Fei) 王菲 aka Wang Jingwen
Wong, James (Huang Zhan) 黃沾
Work Exchange (Jiaogong) 交工
Wu Bai 伍佰
Wu Congxian 吳聰賢
Wu Junde 吳俊德
Wu Na 巫娜
Wu Tun 吳吞 aka Guo Ergang 郭二剛
Wu Zekun 吳澤琨
Wu Zeqi 吳澤琦
Wu, Daniel (Wu Yanzu) 吳彥祖
Wu, Judy (Wu Jindai) 吳金黛
Wynners (Wenna) 溫拿
Xi Jinping 習近平
Xiao Bu Dian 小不點
Xiao He 小河 aka He Guofeng
Xiao Ke 小柯
Xiao Rong 肖容
Xiao Youmei 蕭友梅
Xie Tianxiao 謝天笑
Xifu
Xin Qiji 辛棄疾
Xu Wei 許巍
Xue Cun 雪村
Yan Jun 顏峻
Yang Dajiangzi 子江大楊
Yang Fudong 楊福東
Yang Haisong 楊海崧
Yang Minghuang 楊明煌
Yang Shaobin 楊少斌
Yang Xian 楊弦
Yang Yi 楊一
Yang Yinliu 楊蔭瀏
Yang, Tsu-Chuen (Yang Zujun) 楊祖珩
Yao Lan 姚瀾

Yao, Dajuin (Yao Dajun) 姚大鈞
Ye Pei 葉蓓
Yeh, Sally (Ye Qianwen) 葉蒨文, aka Sally Yip
Yeung, Albert (Yang Shoucheng) 楊受成
Yip, Cecilia (Ye Tong) 葉童
Yip, Wilson (Ye Weixin) 葉偉信
You Yea (You Ya) 尤雅
Young Singers Television Contest (Qingnian Geshou Dianshi Daijiangsai) 青年歌手電視大獎賽
Yu Fei Men 與非門
Yu Guangzhong 余光中
Yu Guoming 喻國明
Yu Jin 于今
Yu Liang 余亮
Yu Qian 於謙
Yuan Zhen 元稹
Yum Kim Fai (Ren Jianhui) 任劍輝
Zafka (Zhang Anding) 張安定
Zhang Chu 張楚
Zhang Jian 張薦
Zhang Ju 張炬
Zhang Ran 張然
Zhang Weiwei 張瑋瑋
Zhang Weiyuan 張維元
Zhang Xiaozhou 張曉舟

Zhang Yadong 張亞東
Zhang Yimou 張藝謀
Zhang Yue 張越
Zhang Yuedong 張躍東
Zhao Benshan 趙本山
Zhao Dexin 趙德鑫
Zhao Jian 趙健
Zhao Wei 趙煒
Zhao Zhongxiang 趙忠祥
Zheng Jun 鄭鈞
Zheng Wei 鄭偉
Zhong Yongfeng 鍾永豐
Zhou Duo 周舵
Zhou Xuan 周璇
Zhou Yunpeng 周雲蓬
Zhu Dake 朱大可
Zhu Fangqiong 朱芳琮
Zhu Qiwei 朱奇偉
Zhu Yonglong 朱永龍
Zhu Zheqin 朱哲琴 aka Dadawa
Zing, A
Zong Baihua 宗白華
Zou Yuanjiang 鄒元江
Zuni Icosahedron (Jinnian Ershimianti) 進念二十面體
Zuoxiao Zuzhou 佐小祖咒 aka Wu Hongjin 吳紅巾

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# Samenvatting: De *Performance* van Identiteit in Chinese Populaire Muziek

weet je, je bent verkeerd verbonden  
ik ben niet die ene van je  
die ene die je zoekt  
wat maakt het nou uit dat ik dezelfde voor- en achternaam heb  
ik zeg je toch, je bent verkeerd verbonden  
waarom zou ik tegen je liegen?  
hoe lang hebben jullie elkaar wel niet gezien?  
je hoort niet eens het verschil tussen haar stem en die van mij!

hoe leef je,  
wat voor leven?  
ben je misschien ondraaglijk eenzaam?  
wie ben je eigenlijk?  
al die ongerijmdheden  
die steeds langs mijn oren strijken

verkeerd verbonden, voor de zoveelste keer  
is het voorbestemd of toeval?  
wie is margaret?  
ze zou je radeloosheid vast heel grappig vinden  
is er iets gebeurd tussen jullie?  
of ben je haar iets schuldig?  
wat is het dat je niet los kan laten?  
ze woont hier niet, en toch blijf je naar haar vragen

waar hebben jullie het dan over?  
zet je dan een lief stemmetje op?  
ben je zo nerveus dat je wil huilen?  
over een paar jaar, als je terugdenkt aan vandaag,  
was het dan de moeite waard?

Hieronder zal ik eerst mijn uitgangspunten samenvatten aan de hand van een songtekst, een geluidsfragment en een beeld, elk van één van de drie artiesten die mij bij het schrijven van dit boek het meest geïnspireerd hebben. Daarna zal ik zijn vijf thematische hoofdstukken

samenvatten. Mijn hoofdvraag is: hoe *performen* teksten, geluiden en beelden identiteit in Chinese populaire muziek?

## Identiteit

De tekst hierboven komt van het nummer VERKEERD VERBONDEN (2001) van het album *Faye Wong* van de gelijknamige zangeres. Het is haar achttiende album en haar laatste voor EMI. De track begint met een opgewekte, syncopische baslijn, waar een blazerssectie het gevoel van een big band aan toevoegt. De melodie in de coupletten begint steeds hoog en loopt langzaam af in de derde regel, op een manier die intimiteit suggereert. Maar behalve een ondeugende speelsheid, die nog versterkt wordt door de souplesse en de warmte van Wongs uitvoering, is er geen hoorbaar verband tussen muziek en tekst. VERKEERD VERBONDEN is een cover, of beter: een adaptatie, met een nieuw arrangement door producer Alvin Leong van IT'S YOUR CHANCE (2001), een Engelstalig rockliedje van de Singaporese zangeres Tanya Chua. Noch in Chua's origineel, noch in DE NIEUWE KLEREN VAN DE KEIZER, Wong's Cantonese versie van dit liedje, gaat het over een telefoon, en het is dan ook waarschijnlijk dat die uit de koker van Wong's vaste tekstdichter Lam Chik komt. Is Faye Wong's signatuur te onderscheiden van die van haar co-producers?

Niet als we de songtekst moeten geloven, want die suggereert dat de beller, een vasthoudende fan, haar stem niet herkent. Wie Wong echt is blijft ongrijpbaar, wat paradoxaal genoeg dan weer haar publieke persona van coole en afzijdige 'showbizkoningin' bevestigt. Dit geldt voor de beller in de tekst, maar ook voor de luisteraar van het liedje. In het laatste couplet zet VERKEERD VERBONDEN de beller neer als onzeker, obsessief en een toekomstige spijtoptant. Toch spreekt Wong door het hele liedje met *jij* niet alleen de beller aan, maar vooral ook de luisteraar. Net als de beller ontvangt de luisteraar de stem van Faye Wong zonder zich fysiek in dezelfde ruimte en tijd als zij te bevinden. En hoewel haar of zijn antwoorden niet te horen zijn in de opname, is de luisteraar van VERKEERD VERBONDEN niet passief. De luisteraar is de ultieme co-producer.

Identiteiten zijn niet individueel, maar collectief. Behalve een persoonlijke naam en een uniek nummer delen identiteitsbewijzen individuen in in groepen, gedefinieerd aan de hand van nationaliteit, etniciteit, leeftijd, klasse en gender. Deze algemeen geaccepteerde criteria voor identiteit zijn belangrijk voor dit boek, en de eerste drie hoofdstukken gaan dan ook over nationaliteit en etniciteit; klasse en subcultuur; en seks, gender en verlangen.

Ik zie die categorieën (of hokjes) niet als onveranderlijk en onvermijdelijk. Ze zijn het gevolg van plaats- en tijdsgebonden keuzes. Nationaliteit, klasse en gender zijn geen neutrale beschrijvingen van een objectieve realiteit, maar sociaal geaccepteerde en werkzame begrippen die bepaalde wereldbeelden in zich meedragen en die bepaalde vormen van gedrag voorschrijven.

## Verbanden Leggen

Nu geluid. Zodra ze de gitaarlijn van Second Hand Roses TREIN NEEM EEN VLUCHT (2001) herkennen, begint het Beijingse publiek enthousiast mee te klappen op de dwingende vierkwartsmaat. Zanger Liang Long vult de tekst aan met tussenwerpsels die afkomstig zijn uit de volksmuziek, zoals *a* en *neige*. Elk couplet eindigt met een geruststellende opwaartse toonladder op elektrische gitaar, met een effect dat een accordeon imiteert. Tegen het einde van het lied maakt de toonladder op gitaar plotseling plaats voor een ritmisch patroon dat doet denken aan de Noordoost-Chinese *yangge* ‘rijstspriet-liederen.’ Het publiek reageert door op en neer te springen en het refrein mee te scanderen, dat nu door alle bandleden samen gezongen wordt:

Onze levens nemen een vlucht!

Waarheen?

Waarheen?

De bas, de akoestische gitaar en de elektrische gitaar vallen in voor de finale. De elektrische gitaar herhaalt nu twee akkoorden (G-F) met zware *distortion* voor extra energie. Als de muziek abrupt stopt, zingt Liang Long terwijl zijn zware *drag* make-up zich met zijn zweet vermengt, met een plagerige, nasale stem: “raad maar,” waarna de band een laatste keer de gitaarmelodie van het begin speelt.

Identiteitspapieren, volksliederen, Faye Wongs VERKEERD VERBONDEN, Second Hand Rose’s TREIN NEEM EEN VLUCHT en andere culturele producten spreken mensen aan en nodigen hen zo uit om deel te nemen aan collectieve belevingswerelden. “Het subject wordt aangesproken, het subject draait zich om, en het subject accepteert de afspraken op basis waarvan hij of zij aangesproken wordt.”<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler heeft dit proces van identiteitsformatie in verband gebracht met *performance* en theatraliteit:

Omdat er noch een “essentie” is die gender uitdraagt of naar buiten brengt, noch een objectief ideaal waarnaar gender streeft, en omdat gender geen feit is, daarom creëren de verscheidene daden van gender het idee van gender ... de daden van gender vragen om een *performance* die *herhaald* wordt?. Deze herhaling is tegelijkertijd de heruitvoering en de herbeleving van een verzameling aan betekenissen die al sociaal geaccepteerd zijn; en het is de dagelijkse en geritualiseerde vorm van hun legitimering.<sup>2</sup>

Identiteiten ontstaan in deze dagelijkse, bijna routinematige handelingen en *performances*. TREIN NEEM EEN VLUCHT, bijvoorbeeld, legt verbanden tussen Noordoost China, Beijing en het Westen

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<sup>1</sup> Butler 1995:6.

<sup>2</sup> Butler 2004:114.

en vertolkt zo een genuanceerde culturele identiteit. Zo bezien zijn identiteiten posities in een netwerk, en worden ze gedefinieerd door hun verbindingen. Op dezelfde wijze is muziek verbonden met samenleving en politiek. Door het collectief zingen van “onze” en “we” door publiek en bandleden *performs* TREIN NEEM EEN VLUCHT een collectief van uitbundige maar relatief machteloze getuigen van overweldigende verandering.

## Wereldmaken

En dan is er het beeld. In 2009 bracht Xiao He zijn tweede soloalbum uit, *De performance van identiteit*. Het album bestaat niet uit authentieke, Dylanesque folksongs van een gekwelde geest, zoals die op de voorganger staan, *Vogels die hoog vliegen landen niet op de rug van een os die niet hard kan lopen* (2002). Nee, *De performance van identiteit* bestaat uit een collectie van geïmproviseerde verkenningen van de menselijke stem en elektronische hulpmiddelen, en van de verbanden tussen akoestische gitaar en zangmelodie. Er zijn geen parafraseerbare songteksten en heel toepasselijk is de titel op de hoes geschreven in een sierlijk maar nauwelijks leesbaar handschrift. Xiao He's naam is onvindbaar, maar zijn foto siert het beeld. Een bouwhelm op zijn hoofd, een arbeiderssjaaltje om zijn nek, een band van een Rode Gardist om zijn arm, een meisjeskous met een geborduurde schoen aan één voet, de schmink van een studentenrol uit de Peking opera en een potsierlijk rode, openstaande mond: alles samen toont dat identiteiten niet eenduidig zijn, maar verwisselbaar en samenstelbaar als kleding.<sup>3</sup>

*Performances* van populaire muziek bieden mensen mogelijkheden om hun identiteiten te formuleren en bij elkaar te rapen, beweert Tia Denora in *Muziek in het Dagelijks Leven* (2000):

De interessantste vragen over de sociale implicaties van artefacten (of dat nu technologieën, uitspraken of esthetische materialen zoals muziek zijn) richten zich op het interactionele niveau waar formuleringen – verbanden – tussen mensen, scenes en omgevingen feitelijk geproduceerd worden, en waar raamwerken van orde *in real time* in stand gehouden en ondermijnd worden. Met betrekking tot muzikaal affect, zorgt het erkennen dat muziek ... een aanreikingsstructuur is [dat wil zeggen, een structuur die sommige vormen van gebruik aanreikt] ervoor dat muziek begrepen kan worden ... als een plaats of ruimte voor ‘werk’ of het maken van betekenis en levenswereld. Muziek kan, met ander woorden, opgeroepen worden als bondgenoot voor een reeks van wereldscheppende activiteiten, het is een werkplek voor semiotische activiteit, een grondstof voor het doen, zijn en benoemen van aspecten van maatschappelijke werkelijkheid, met inbegrip van de werkelijkheden van subjectiviteit en zelf.<sup>4</sup>

In dit boek zoek ik uit hoe Chinese populaire muziek aangrijpingspunten biedt voor het stuksgewijze werk van wereldmaken. De eerste stap daarin is het benaderen van muziek als een

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<sup>3</sup> 21CN 2009.

<sup>4</sup> DeNora 2000:40.

combinatie geluid-beeld-tekst. Geluiden definiëren muziek, maar de foto's op albums en magazines en de vertogen van songteksten en online discussieforums zijn ook cruciale onderdelen van populaire muziek. Muziek is dus ook synesthetisch. De bovenstaande uiteenzetting over de tekst van Wong, het geluid van Second Hand Rose en het beeld van Xiao He illustreren dat al deze dingen zingen, verbeelden en spreken. Daarnaast resoneert de onscheidbaarheid van tekst, geluid en beeld met Chinese podiumtradities, die doorgaans aangeduid worden als *opera*.

Een tweede stap is om het werk van wereldmaken te beschrijven aan de hand van specifieke thema's. De keuze voor een thematische benadering komt ook voort uit mijn onvrede met de soms wat al te gehaaste politieke duiding van Chinese muziek. Tijdens de Koude Oorlog en in de nadagen van de Protestbeweging van 1989 was het benadrukken van de tegenstelling tussen (onderdrukkende) staat en (onderdrukt) Volk begrijpelijk, maar ik heb ervoor gekozen deze ter discussie te stellen. Met dat doel richt ik me op dwarsverbanden en tussenpersonen, en analyseer ik posities en *performances* vanuit hun specifieke, thematische milieu. Zodoende bouw ik voort op de inzichten omtrent culturele identiteit en gender in Chinese popmuziek, van Andrew Jones, Andreas Steen, Nimrod Baranovitch, Jeroen de Kloet, Marc L. Moskowitz en Anthony Fung.<sup>5</sup> Tegelijkertijd wil ik nieuwe onderwerpen aankaarten, zoals classificatie, theatraliteit en creativiteit.

## Plaats

Wat is er Chinees aan Chinese populaire muziek?

Chinese popmuziek is altijd heel internationaal geweest. De industrie begon in het semi-koloniale Shanghai in de jaren 1920, het centrum verschoof in 1950 naar Hong Kong, en in de loop van de jaren 1990 steeds meer naar Taipei. De bindende factor in deze geschiedenis is niet landsgrenzen of het gebruik van specifieke instrumenten of toonsoorten, maar taal.

Faye Wong werd geboren in Beijing, en brak door in Hong Kong in het begin van de jaren 1990 door te zingen in het cantonees, de voertaal van Hong Kong. De toonaangevende rol die het cantonees destijds had in popmuziek in Oost en Zuid-Oost Azië verdween langzaam. Als meest succesvolle Chinese zangeres droeg Wong hieraan bij door over te stappen op het mandarijn, haar moedertaal. In haar geluid, beeld en tekst verbindt Wong moeiteloos boeddhisme, Assepoester en Chanel, en creëert zo een tijdloze, kosmopolitische wereld.

Second Hand Rose mengt rockmuziek met Twee-Omstebeurt, een vorm van cabaret uit Noordoost China. Hoewel Second Hand Rose in dialect zingt, zetten ze de cultuur van het Noord-Chinese platteland in om ideeën te formuleren over China als een moderne natiestaat met eigen karakteristieken. Zodoende plaatsen ze zich in een reeks bands die in Beijing gevestigd zijn en die inspiratie putten uit traditionele en lokale Chinese muziek.

Bij Xiao He lijkt het idee van een natie afwezig. Hij verbindt volksmuziek, wereldmuziek, jazz en rock zonder deze om te vormen in een samenhangend idee van

<sup>5</sup> Baranovitch 2003, De Kloet 2010, Moskowitz 2010, Fung 2008.

Chineesheid of een andere culturele identiteit. Xiao He zingt dan ook vaak klanken zonder conventionele betekenis.

Hoewel definities nooit sluitend kunnen zijn, werk ik uiteindelijk met een definitie van Chinese populaire muziek die taal (mandarijn, cantonees, hakka), etniciteit (Han-Chinees) en geografische lokatie (Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taipei, Singapore) combineert. Omdat van deze drie alleen taal te horen is in de muziek, is taal het meest werkbare criterium. Hoe dan ook betekent dit dat Chinese populaire muziek meer is dan de muziek van de Volksrepubliek China.

## Genre en Classificatie

Is Chinese rock subversief, pop massaal en folk conservatief, en zijn dit wel de juiste vragen?

Veeleer dan een coherent genre, is rock in China altijd een verzameling gebleven van geïmporteerde muzieksoorten die minder goed verkopen dan pop. Critici in de Volksrepubliek China zagen van rock in de jaren 1980 vooral zijn verschil met commerciële pop en officiële massamuziek, en in de jaren 1990 raakte de term ‘ondergrondse muziek’ in zwang. Maar Second Hand Rose liet horen dat een rockband tegelijk sociaal geëngageerd en verkoopbaar kan zijn. In 2001 braken ze door met de leus “Broeder, dat je rock speelt, wat heeft dat nou voor zin,” gezongen in een boers dialect. De poging van Second Hand Rose is maar ten dele succesvol geweest, omdat ze genre ondergeschikt maakten aan verbanden langs regio’s, generaties en verkoopbaarheid.

Net als de meeste Chinese popsterren legt Faye Wong zich niet vast op één muziekgenre. Haar albums bestaan uit romantische *ballads*, aangevuld met R&B, rock, triphop en andere genres, en klinken alternatief op een verkoopbare manier. Zodoende heeft ze de weg vrijgemaakt voor vrouwelijke singer-songwriters, die zich voornamelijk bewust tonen van hun genre-identiteit door die te ontkennen, of in hun beklag over de onwil van de industrie om te investeren in nichemarkten.

De termen *volk* en *folk* als aanduidingen van muzieksoorten zijn omstreden, onder andere omdat ze raken aan het fundament van de Volksrepubliek China. Sinds de jaren 1950 wordt op conservatoria een Chinese volkszangwijze onderwezen die sterk beïnvloed is door bel canto. Ook de zelfgeschreven gitaarmuziek die studenten sinds eind jaren 1970 op Taiwanese campussen maken heet volksmuziek, ook al is deze snel opgegaan in de mainstream pop. Tenslotte grijpen sommige artiesten in eenentwintigste-eeuws Beijing terug op de authentieke volksmuziek, terwijl Xiao He en vele anderen de akoestische gitaar benaderen als een modern instrument waarop je makkelijk volksliedjes kan spelen, maar dat ook zonder moeite gecombineerd kan worden met elektrische en digitale instrumenten.

Kortom, de Chinese popmuziek is niet zozeer verdeeld in genres, subculturen en scenes, als wel aan de hand van verschillen in taal-geografie-etniciteit, generatie, gender en verkoopbaarheid.

## Seks, Gender en Verlangen

Liefdesliedjes domineren de Chinese populaire muziek. Hoe wakkeren ze verlangen aan? Wat voor mogelijkheden bieden ze aan luisteraars om seksualiteit en gender te uiten?

Op *Vogels die hoog vliegen landen niet op de rug van een os die niet hard kan lopen* is Xiao He een troubadour die zijn gekmakend onbereikbare vrouw bezingt. Zodoende wakkert dit basale plot verlangen aan. Maar het veresthetiseert ook de al te rauwe werkelijkheid, en maakt het object van verlangen (de vrouw) vleugellam.

Chinese popzangers en zangeressen benadrukken traditioneel hun ondergeschiktheid, passiviteit en begeerlijkheid, eigenschappen die in verband werden gebracht met vrouwelijkheid. In de jaren 1990 promoot Leslie Cheung het idee dat mannen ook mooi kunnen zijn. Hij is tegelijk idool, waarbij de fan verlangt met de ster samen te zijn, en punt van identificatie, waarbij de fan droomt de ster te zijn en het leven van de ster te leven.

Faye Wong brak door met het nummer KWETSBARE VROUW, dat mooie, passieve vrouwelijkheid ten tonele voert. Maar in 1993 knipte ze haar haar kort en begon ze een coolheid te *performen* die op dat moment ongehoord was in de Chinese popmuziek. Daarin gaat ze zelden zo ver dat ze feministische kritiek uit. Maar ze versterkt de positie van moderne vrouwen wel door hen een coole droomwereld aan te reiken die onverschillig is ten aanzien van zulke wereldse zaken als het huwelijk, paparazzi, de tand des tijds en zelfs gender. Net als bij Cheung erotiseren fans Wong en tegelijkertijd identificeren ze zich met haar eigenwijsheid. De suggestie van een innerlijke, onbezoedelde A Faye die als een Alice door deze droomwereld zweeft maakte ook dat Wong taboes op huwelijk en moederschap kon doorbreken zonder aan populariteit in te boeten.

In rock spreken liefdesliedjes via de vrouw de man aan op zijn machteloosheid. Liang Long, de zanger van Second Hand Rose, neemt het machismo van Chinese rockmuziek op de hak door op te treden in vrouwenkleding. Meer dan een afrekening met de dominantie van de man is Second Hand Rose een volgende stap in de herwaardering van de mannelijke homosocialiteit of kameraadschappelijkheid, wat onder andere te horen is aan hun nadruk op loyaliteit en verwijzingen naar kungfu-romans. Second Hand Rose verbindt de erosie van broederschap aan de verwarrende verleidingen van de economie, en voorziet zo de veranderende zeden van speels en ironisch commentaar.

## Theatraliteit

Hoe verhoudt Chinese populaire muziek zich tot de werkelijkheid?

Met behulp van de begrippen *aanroep*, *formulering* en *wereldmaken* heb ik uitgelegd hoe *performances* zich in het algemeen verhouden tot de wereld om ons heen. Maar als we inzoomen op theatrale optredens blijkt dat ze dat op heel verschillende wijzen doen. Doen-alsof-*performances* brengen een wereld ten tonele die van het publiek verwijderd en ervoor afgesloten is – het is daar bijvoorbeeld een ander tijdperk, of er zijn andere weersomstandigheden.

Reflectieve *performances* erkennen hun theatraliteit door hun raamwerk expliciet te maken. Ze spreken het publiek bijvoorbeeld direct aan. Ik zie dit doen-alsof en deze reflectiviteit als uitersten van een schaal van theatraliteit.

Humor speelt met grenzen (van betamelijkheid) en is dus bij uitstek geschikt voor reflectiviteit. Twee-Omstebeurt is reflectief theater: de clown en de dame vallen de hele tijd uit hun rol en vragen om applaus. Second Hand Rose neemt dit over in de anekdotes die Liang Long tussen de nummers door vertelt. Maar de nummers zelf klinken zoveel mogelijk als op CD en neigen daarmee naar autonomie en doen-alsof. Dit doen-alsof wordt versterkt door de extravagante kledij van de band, die suggereert dat het podium een buitengewone wereld is.

Van *folk* leent Xiao He het bagatelliseren van de scheiding tussen kunst en leven. Op CD streven zijn liedjes geen authenticiteit na, maar laten ze in hun overdrijvingen expliciet horen dat de emotie gespeeld is. In zijn wekelijks, geïmproviseerde optredens zoekt Xiao He nadrukkelijk contact met het publiek, onder andere met behulp van provocatie en humor. Soms lijkt de scheiding tussen podium en publiek te vervagen.

Faye Wong maakt maar in één nummer een grapje. Over het algemeen bieden popsterren toegang tot buitengewone, veresthetiseerde werelden, waarin de lichamelijkheid van een lach, een snik of een hoest niet passen. Chinese popsterren kunnen zonder moeite filmrollen spelen zonder dat dat de geloofwaardigheid van hun muziek aantast. Faye Wongs rollen in Wong Kar-wai's films verwijzen op speelse wijze naar haar biografie als zangeres, waardoor de film een extra, reflectief element krijgt zonder dat het doen-alsof van de plot in gevaar komt.

## Muziek Organiseren

Hoe ontstaat Chinese populaire muziek? Wie doet dat?

In SHUI18 weeft Xiao He een tapijt van geluid door steeds meer *loops* in zijn geluidseffect te spelen. De herhalingen overlappen net niet helemaal, waardoor het gevoel van langs elkaar schuivende ijsschotsen ontstaat. Met een keyboard dat aangesloten is op zijn laptop voegt Xiao He een solo toe van bubbelend water, terwijl op de achtergrond vertraagde beelden van watervallen en tornado's te zien zijn. In de manklopende reproductie golven de geluiden omhoog en vallen ze terug in een oersoep, met daarin onder andere voor het grijpen de aanreikingen van zijn gitaar en digitale instrumenten, de visuele projecties van regisseur Zhang Yuedong, en de herinnering van een vergelijkbare nummer dat de experimentele gitarist Wang Changcun een paar dagen eerder in bijzijn van Xiao He en mij ten gehore bracht.

Chinese populaire muziek ontstaat in een evolutionair proces van reproductie, variatie en selectie. Niet alleen Xiao He en Chinese volksmuziek, ook Second Hand Rose schrijft nummers door bestaande muzikale elementen te herschikken en te vertalen naar een nieuw milieu. DE ONTBOEZEMING VAN EEN CONTACTADVERTENTIE is een rocknummer dat begint met een intro dat gebaseerd is op verhalenvertellersmuziek. In de *bridge* brengt zanger Liang Long een overgeleverde sketch uit Twee-Omstebeurt ten gehore op muziek die het *outro* imiteert van FUNKY MONKS van de Amerikaans band The Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Dit constante hergebruik staat haaks op het idee van de autonome kunstenaar, dat ook aan het fundament van het idee van exclusieve auteursrechten ligt. Tot dusver heb ik Faye Wong behandeld als individu, terwijl haar geluiden, beelden en teksten het resultaat zijn van de activiteiten van een heel scala aan mensen. Wong selecteert deze mensen, geeft ze vage instructies, onderwerpt zich aan hun ideeën tijdens de opname, videoclip of live show, en evalueert het eindresultaat nadien. Het resultaat is een collectief en veelzijdig organisme, waarbij Wong een minimum van eenheid garandeert door de herkenbaarheid van haar stem en gezicht, maar ook door haar overzicht van het selectieproces.

Mijn beschrijving van de processen van reproductie, variatie en selectie toont niet dat Chinese populaire muziek minder creatief of origineel is dan andere muzieken, maar ontwikkelt een vocabulaire om de collectiviteit van haar creativiteit te beschrijven.

## Conclusie

De teksten, beelden en geluiden van Faye Wong, Xiao He en Second Hand Rose reiken luisteraars heel gevarieerd materiaal aan voor wereldmaken en identiteitsformatie. Daarin staan plaats- en tijdsgebonden duidingen van verschillen in taal-geografie-etniciteit, generatie, gender, verkoopbaarheid en sociale klasse centraal, in de specifieke constellaties en netwerken zoals ik die hierboven en door het hele boek heen uiteengezet heb.

Het werk van wereldmaken is vergelijkbaar met dat van muziek maken, en dat vindt niet plaats in geïsoleerde individuen maar in een ecologie die zich constant ontwikkelt op een manier die vergelijkbaar is met die van de biologische evolutie. Maar hoeveel de creatieve processen van wereldmaken en muziek maken ook op elkaar mogen lijken, muziek is tegelijkertijd ook theater op een manier die het alledaagse gedrag van wereldmaken over het algemeen niet is. Dat komt door het zetten van bakens en raamwerken, waar *performances* vervolgens heel verschillend mee omgaan. Soms is muziek doen-alsof en reikt het een alternatieve, extraordinaire of utopische wereld aan. Soms is het reflectief en toont het zich bewust van het podium en de sociale realiteit van het publiek. Dit spel werkt ook als de luisteraar en de artiest zich niet fysiek in de dezelfde ruimte en tijd bevinden en de stem ontlichaamd is, zoals in VERKEERD VERBONDEN. De technologische ontwikkelingen van de microfoon, opnameapparatuur, geluidsdragers en distributiekkanalen die populaire muziek definiëren en voortstuwen verbinden massa's mensen over grote afstanden intiem met hun popsterren en sluiten hun werelden aan op de huiskamers van talloze appartementen.

Ik kan alleen maar hopen dat zelfs als u verkeerd gedraaid heeft, dit boek u helpt werelden van uzelf te maken.

*Curriculum Vitae*  
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