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

Groenewegen, J.W.P.

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# 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.

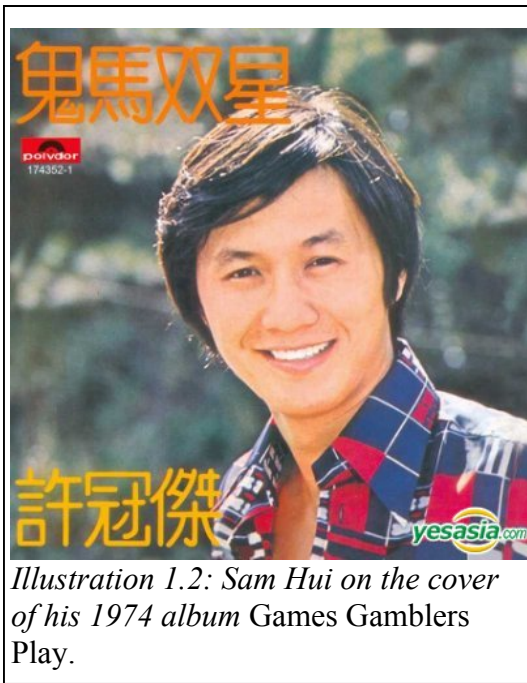


Illustration 1.2: Sam Hui on the cover of his 1974 album *Games Gamblers Play*.

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-

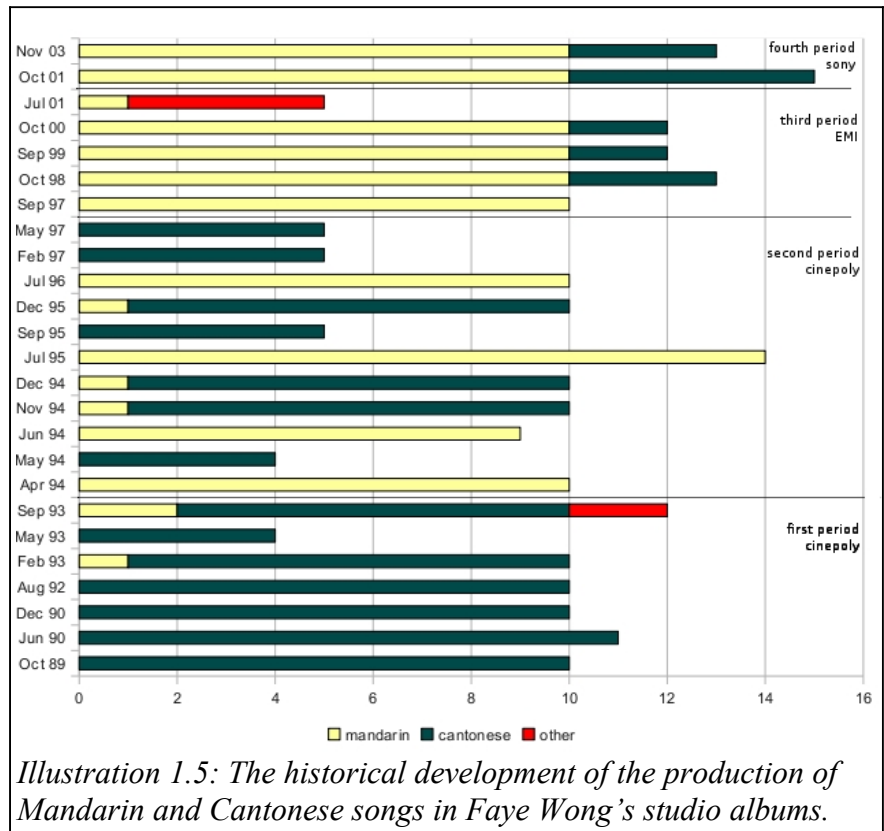


Illustration 1.5: The historical development of the production of Mandarin and Cantonese songs in Faye Wong's studio albums.

<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.

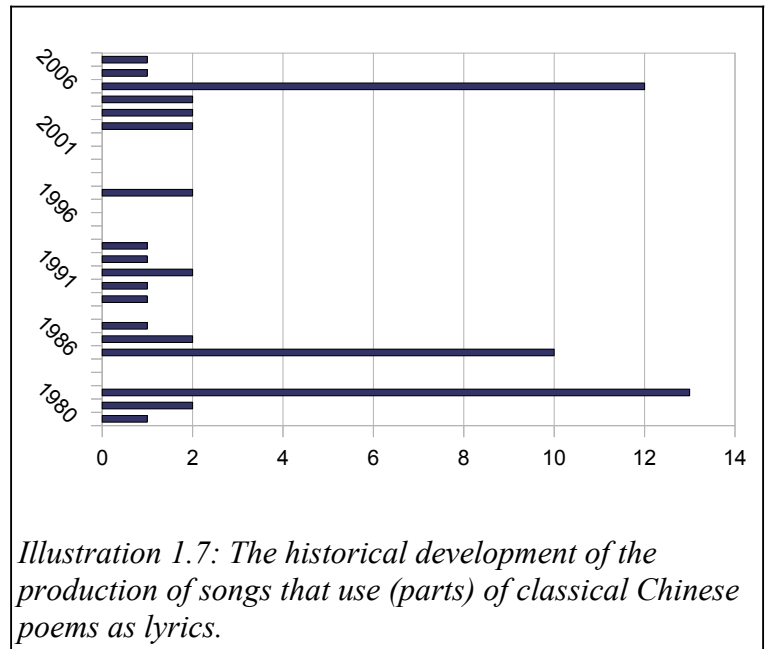
Already in 1982 Lo Ta-yu famously parodied the archaic words and nostalgia of Campus Song in *Pedantry* 之乎者也:

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.

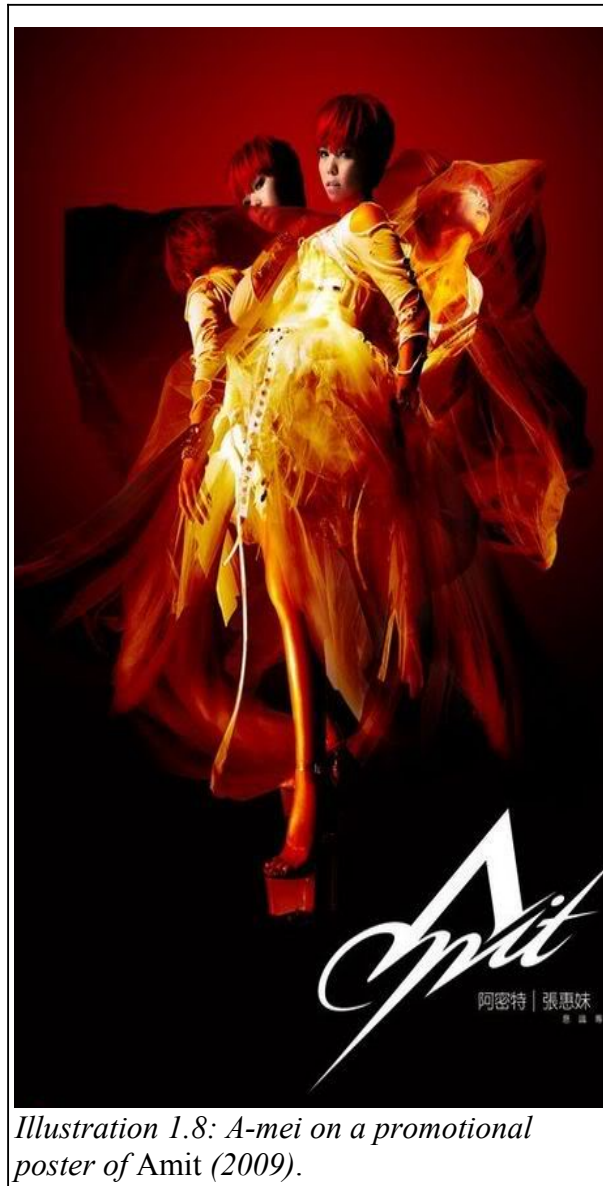


Illustration 1.8: A-mei on a promotional poster of *Amit* (2009).

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.

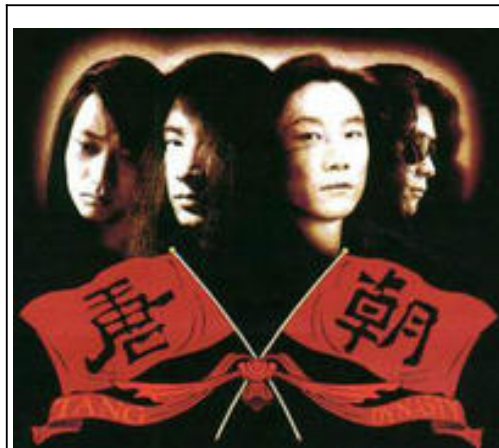


like Xin Qiji wrote many nationalistic poems. Like *Lunhui/Again*, Tang Dynasty articulates its ties to tradition also through music when, toward the end of “Returning in Dream to the Tang Dynasty,” they temporarily deviate from the Western heavy-metal style that dominates the song to recite two lines 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 *NORTHEASTERNERS 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.

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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

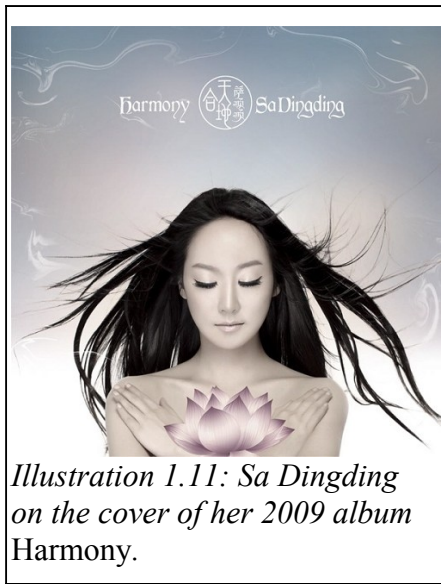


Illustration 1.11: Sa Dingding on the cover of her 2009 album *Harmony*.

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 原生態 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.

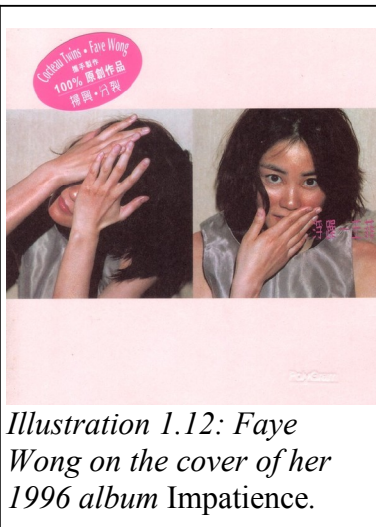


Illustration 1.12: Faye Wong on the cover of her 1996 album *Impatience*.

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.

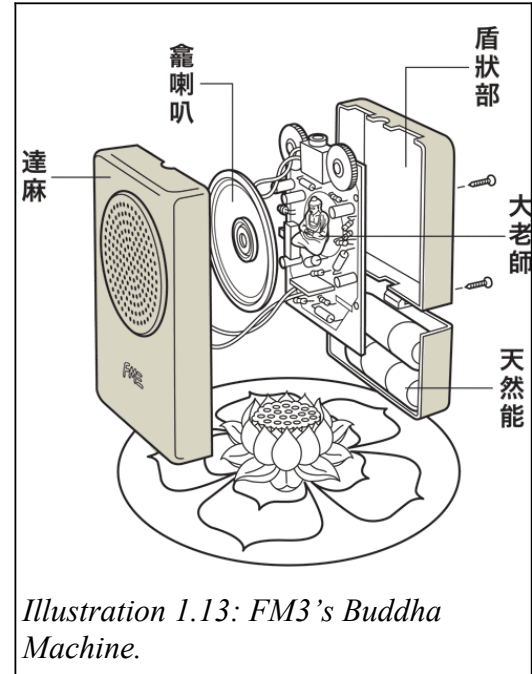


Illustration 1.13: FM3's Buddha Machine.

## 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.