



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The performance of identity in Chinese popular music

Groenewegen, J.W.P.

Citation

Groenewegen, J. W. P. (2011, June 15). *The performance of identity in Chinese popular music*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/17706>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/17706>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Chapter 3: Sex, Gender, and Desire

§1 Fantasy

就像你註定是要離開的

Like you were destined to leave.

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

對不起

Sorry.

[*To the audience:*]

世界卻不會
因為你走了而停止

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

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

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

鼻涕会流到嘴里
口水却流不到鼻子里

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



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

这是一个简单的道理
简单得不用阐述
也知道是错的道理

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

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

The Troubadour and the Lady

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

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

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

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

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

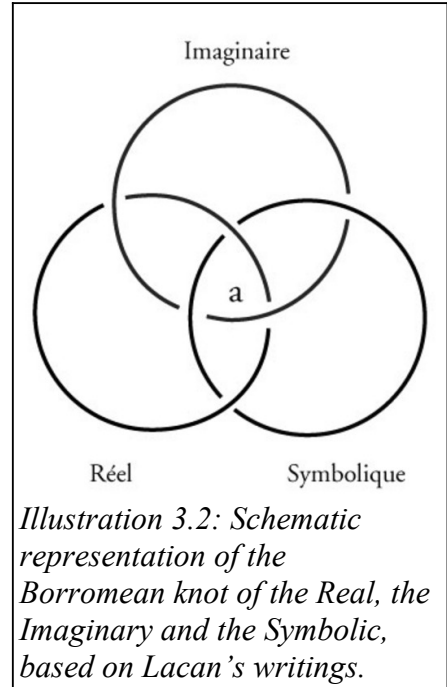
¹ Lacan 1992:149-151 (translated by Dennis Porter).

² Žižek 1997:7. Cf. p. 10, and Žižek 1989:46.

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

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

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



An Eternally Sweet Void of Desire

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

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

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

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

生長成了海

It grows into a sea.

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

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

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

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

The violence in these lyrics stems not so much from the failure to curb *jouissance* into language as from its success in doing so, since humor and absurdity suspend the symbolic order, giving free play to *jouissance*. Xiao He truly wishes his frigid Lady dead, but can only express this in fantasy. The absurd transposition of the description renders the death wish acceptable, and makes the audience complicit by making them laugh.

In the last lines of the song, Xiao He kills his Lady, albeit symbolically. These lines are followed by the last instrumental chorus, thus valuing the *jouissance* of musicality (real) over the interplay of lack and desire of language (symbolic), in a way reminiscent of Romanticism. Žižek:

In contrast to deceiving verbal speech, in music, it is, to paraphrase Lacan, the truth itself which speaks. ... What music renders [with Romanticism] is no longer the “semantics of the soul [of the Enlightenment],” but the underlying “noumenal” flux of *jouissance* beyond the linguistic meaningfulness.⁵

This celebration of Romantic *jouissance* can also be found in other songs of Xiao He, his reluctance to use language (see Chapter 1) and his connections to avant-garde art (see Chapter 2). For instance, Glorious Pharmacy’s first studio album *Please Enlarge My Cousin’s Picture* 請給我放大一張錶妹的照片 (2005) opens with 24 DEGREES 24度, “the most suitable temperature for the human body:”

迎面開來一輛大車	A big car comes at me, head-on.
我沒有躲得過	I can’t dodge.
我躺在馬路的中央	Lying in the middle of the road,
像是躺在媽媽的懷里	it’s just like in in my mother’s arms.

⁵ Žižek 2004:18.

媽媽的懷里從來都沒有高于24度	In my mother's arms it's never more than 24 degrees.
現在正哭泣在妻子的懷里	Now I'm crying in my wife's arms.
妻子的懷里從來都沒有高于24度	In my wife's arms it's never more than 24 degrees.
其實最不需要的就是警察	In fact what we need least of all is the police.

The equation of mother and wife, and the antipathy for the police as representative of the Law-of-the-Father invite a psychoanalytical reading, with the car accident as the violent rupture in the symbolic order that catapults the protagonist back into the womb's *jouissance*. Žižek writes:

Desire and *jouissance* are inherently antagonistic, even exclusive: desire's *raison d'être* ... is not to realize its goal, to find full satisfaction, but to reproduce itself as desire. So how is it possible to couple desire and *jouissance*, to guarantee a minimum of *jouissance* within the space of desire? It is the famous Lacanian *objet petit a* that mediates between the incompatible domains of desire and *jouissance*. In what precise sense is *objet petit a* the object-cause of desire? The *objet petit a* is not what we desire, what we are after, but, rather, that which sets our desire in motion, in the sense of the formal frame which confers consistency on our desire: desire is, of course, metonymical; it shifts from one object to another; through all these displacements, however, desire none the less retains a minimum of formal consistency, a set of phantasmic features which, when they are encountered in a positive object, make us desire this object.⁶

In 24 DEGREES and SIMPLE TRUTH, Xiao He celebrates pre-symbolic unity. However, he does so by creating a fantasy through the manipulation of the desire-permeated symbolic order. This fantasy involves the strategic discrediting of fantasy. It discredits fantasy by strategic positioning of the Lady as an unattainable *objet petit a* and the instrumental chorus as a semblance of pre-symbolic *jouissance*. The common sense of SIMPLE TRUTH's last verse signifies not closure and disposal, but going through fantasy. SIMPLE TRUTH performs a sane distance to fantasy, even though this means accepting castration and lack – as the song's abrupt ending on the third beat of the measure may suggest. Žižek:

Traversing, going through the fantasy, means that we accept the vicious circle of revolving around the void of the object and find *jouissance* in it.⁷

Chinese Genders

Love songs never tire of retracing these circles, with specific instances exploring and favoring particular articulations, settings and divisions of roles. Below I will gradually unpack and extend the basic narrative that fuels desire, starting from the castrated subject

⁶ Žižek 1997:39.

⁷ Žižek 1998:210. Cf. Žižek 1997:30-33.

\$'s circling around the void of the object of desire. In doing so, I will investigate culturally specific articulations, settings and, especially, gender roles.

The title of this chapter, *Sex, Gender, and Desire*, originates from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*.⁸ Sex is the real of love.⁹ It includes the physicality and activity of human bodies, but that is perhaps already saying too much, since the real cannot be presented symbolically. The significance and attraction of material objects and biological traits are the results of the curves, gaps and inconsistencies of symbolic space.¹⁰ Focusing on gender, I submit that it in itself forms a Borromean knot of real, symbolic (gender expectations, laws, appellations) and imaginary (coherence, unconsciousness) orders that is permeated by *jouissance* and desire.

Song Geng argues that in China the masculine/feminine opposition needs to be supplemented with that between *yin* 阴 and *yang* 阳:

yin or *yang* is not a biological entity but a fluid position in the hierarchy of social and political power. A minister was in the *yang* aspect in relation to his wife but was in the *yin* position when he faced the emperor in court. Therefore it would not be difficult to understand the tradition of speaking from the voice of a female persona when addressing the emperor or superiors in Chinese literature.¹¹

This interpretation of *yin* and *yang* is consistent with gender's dissociation from biological traits, and offers a powerful tool for the interpretation of Chinese gender roles. For instance, in SIMPLE TRUTH *yang*-associated humor and violence force the opponent's threatening *yin* back into its obedient position. However, this paradoxically happens through drowning in sweetened milk, which suggests *yin*'s water-like powers. Furthermore, musically, the wordless chorus suggests the underlying dominance of *yin*, albeit in a subdued way. The organization of this chapter is dictated by the interplay of *yin* and *yang* as well as by the basic narrative of desire. I explore gender roles related to the beauty (§2), the talent (§3), toughness (§4), rivals and brothers (§5), the moon (§6) and the fox fatale (§7).

§2 The Beauty

Where the canso of the twelfth-century troubadour can be seen as the locus classicus of love poetry in the European tradition, I see the 'talent and beauty' 才子佳人 story *The Western Wing* 西廂記, written by Wang Shifu (ca. 1250-1300), as embodying the stereo-

⁸ Butler 1990: 6-7.

⁹ Žižek 2006:49: "since sexuality is the domain in which we get closest to the intimacy of another human being, totally exposing ourselves to him or her, sexual enjoyment is real for Lacan: something traumatic in its breathtaking intensity, yet impossible in the sense that we cannot make sense of it. This is why a sexual relation, in order to function, has to be screened through some fantasy."

¹⁰ Žižek 2006:72-73: "in a way that echoes Einstein, for Lacan the Real – the Thing – is not so much the inert presence that curves symbolic space (introducing gaps and inconsistencies in it), but, rather, an effect of these gaps and inconsistencies."

¹¹ Song 2004:15. Cf. Brownell 2002:26.

typical romantic relations of Chinese tradition. Wilt Idema and Stephen West note that *The Western Wing* was known as a lovers' bible, offering a rich vocabulary, gender types, models for action and clues to the negotiation of stereotyped fantasy (romance) and social reality (marriage).¹²

The Western Wing tells of student Zhang who at first sight falls in love with the beauty Oriole Cui. They consume their romantic sentiment 情, which contrasts with the stereotypical *canoso*; with *The Western Wing*'s precursor, the Tang Dynasty 'marvelous tale' 傳奇 *Tale of Oriole* 鶯鶯傳 (aka *An Encounter with an Immortal* 会真記, by Yuan Zhen (779-831)); and with later Chinese romanticism such as *A Dream of Red Mansions* (by Cao Xueqin (1715-1764)). In *The Western Wing*, the couple have a tryst, and finally they marry.¹³

The dynamics between *yin* and *yang* drive the plot of *The Western Wing*. On his



Illustration 3.3: Publicity magazine cover for the 1927 film *Romance of the Western Chamber* 西廂記 (d. Hou Yao). The film tells how student Zhang saves Oriole Cui, prompting viewers to save the nation. In an innovative dream sequence Student Zhang beats his rival with a giant brush/phallus (Harris 1999:68).

way to the capital to secure a place in the *yang* world of public service, student Zhang enters the world of *yin*: the action takes place in the seclusion of a monastery where Zhang is at the mercy of women. With her common sense and detective work, it is Oriole Cui's worldly-wise maidservant Crimson who reminds the couple – and especially Oriole Cui – of social reality when they seem to get carried away in the 'talent and beauty' plot, was which by then already commonplace:

Now I believe that poets and beauties really exist,
But in Crimson's eyes they are a bit perverse—
It seems to me that passionate people who do
not get their heart's desire are like this:
What I see is that they suffer so much, they become bewitched;
And what I find is that they never give a second thought
But immediately bury their heads to prepare for a wasting death.¹⁴

Oriole Cui is torn between filial piety – obedience to her mother – and romantic desire for student Zhang, delineated by a sexuality that "seems to be a mystery

¹² West 1995:96.

¹³ Song 2004:102.

¹⁴ West 1995:78.

to her, something almost unconscious.”¹⁵ The only viable reconciliation is marriage, in other words, Oriole Cui’s transformation from inaccessible Lady “insubstantial as a mirage” into wife and mother, from object/cause of desire into subject.¹⁶

The traditional femininity of which Oriole Cui is a paradigmatic example is continually reiterated in popular media, including pop songs, theatrical performances, TV adaptations and films based on traditional and newly written ‘talent and beauty’ stories. In the following pages I will focus on the first half of the 20th century, and especially on contributions by songstress Zhou Xuan (1918-1959) and female impersonator Mei Lanfang (1894-1961) to the concept of the ‘new woman’ 新女性 that emerged in China between 1911 and 1949.¹⁷

The Female Impersonator

In Peking Opera, as in many other Chinese operatic traditions, roles are divided into role-types, and actors specialize in these types. For instance, the *dan* 旦 is the role-type for female roles such as Oriole Cui and Concubine Yu in *Farewell My Concubine* 霸王別姬. Mei Lanfang was trained as a *dan*. In other words, he was a female impersonator, and a very successful one. Mei introduced a new, elaborate and visually attractive subdivision of the *dan*, the *huashan* 花衫, capitalized upon the star system that emerged through newly established mass media outlets, and transformed Peking Opera into a national art form.

Throughout the dynastic period, music and theater were considered vulgar, and the divisions between performers, courtesans and prostitutes were fluid. Opera actors could be approached for sexual favors.¹⁸ Joshua Goldstein writes:

Mei succeeded despite the fact that a disparaging association of *dan* actors with homosexuality was pervasive throughout the Republican period [1912-1937]. This may be because, at the same time, the expansion of the female audience problematized the prevalent forms of homoerotic spectatorship. Thus, with the inclusion of women, the admiring erotic gaze of the audience became more polyvalent. In Mei’s case, the media found it both provocative and profitable to direct this ambivalently gendered gaze upon China’s most beautiful man/woman.

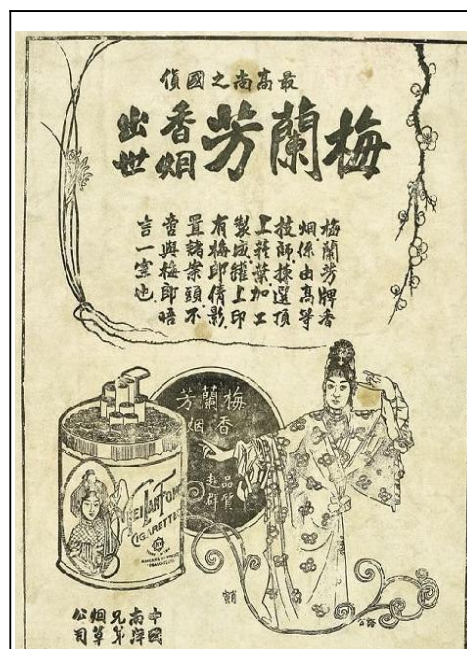


Illustration 3.4: Advertisement of Mei Lanfang cigarette in Good Friend Pictorial 良友畫報, 1926, issue 12.

¹⁵ West 1995:69.

¹⁶ West 1995: 62, 60. Lee 2001.

¹⁷ Chou 2004:112.

¹⁸ Zou 2006:87 cites an explicit 1912 police report. Cf. Sommer 2002.

Journalists alternately described Mei as exquisitely dignified, a handsome playboy, a youthful bride, and a natural-born sex kitten (*tiansheng youwu*). While numerous cosmetic companies, targeting female consumers, solicited Mei's endorsements for their youth-preserving creams, the gaping crowds invoked in many articles were clearly comprised of both sexes.¹⁹

The increasing prominence of the male *dan* resonates with the emergence of the new woman.²⁰ The gist of Goldstein's article on Mei Lanfang on the one hand, and Andreas Steen's article on Zhou Xuan and parts of Andrew Jones's *Yellow Music* on the other, is that these stars successfully couple *yin*-beauty to a nationalist *yang*-discourse. Mei Lanfang presented Peking Opera as the artistic embodiment of the national soul, with the help of critics such as Qi Rushan. Zhou Xuan performed the pathos of the songstress as metaphor for national crisis, with the help of Leftist Shanghai cinema. This coupling worked both ways: it rendered the nationalist agenda appealing, and eroticism acceptable.

The Songstress

Oriole Cui's central scene is her love letter, in which she voices anxiety at the prospect of accusations of immoral behavior, effectively manipulating to her advantage the role of abandoned woman prescribed by the 'talent and beauty' model. The songstress 歌女, a stock figure of Shanghai cinema since the 1920s, similarly appeals to *yang*-powers to come into action by the dramatic display of *yin*-powerlessness – now leaving the rescue to the *yang*-invested audience. Zhou Xuan defined the songstress through her cinematic and musical performances, and her well-known turbulent but unhappy love life and her mental instability serve as the primary evidence for the popular belief that she *is* the "songstress at the end of the world" 天涯歌女. Sam Ho writes:



Illustration 3.5: Zhou Xuan.

The brilliant title number in *Song of a Songstress* 歌女之歌 (1948) offers a succinct portrayal of the songstress persona. Appearing at the end of film, the scene takes Zhou [Xuan] back to the nightclub, from where songstresses can never escape. Despite having just witnessed her whole life crumbling down on her, Zhou is back on stage, she performs an upbeat song, wearing a glittery gown and a big, professional smile ... her music isn't able to solve

¹⁹ Goldstein 1999:395-6.

²⁰ Consequently, although Mei performed Oriole Cui, he is better known for adopting a version of *Farewell My Concubine* 霸王別姬 that centers on Concubine Yu. Cf. Li 2003:79, Zou 2006.

anything. In fact the very performance is a tragedy, a testimony to the powerlessness of the songstress and her song.²¹

Rather than contrasting Mei and Zhou as traditional and modern, I note that both made use of modern technology and responded to modern social developments while reiterating the traditionally prescribed eagerness of women to sacrifice themselves for their men. Likewise, rather than presenting Mei as male and Zhou as female, I observe that both profited from and contributed to the increasing participation of women in public life. At the same time this female emancipation was limited, including for Zhou Xuan. Her stardom was constructed by men, almost as much as Mei Lanfang's, as Li Jinhui's control over the all-female Bright Moon Troupe shows.²² The division of labor in the Bright Moon Troupe, with women performing center stage, and men supporting and controlling from behind the scenes as composers, managers, lyricists and instrumentalists, has been the norm of Chinese popular music for decades, even though since the 1970s men have also stepped into the limelight as singers.

Beauty

According to Andrew Jones, the songstress “sells songs ... and by extension her own body.”²³ In response to accusations at the time, Li Jinhui legitimized center-staging beauty 美 by invoking Social Darwinism. He is quoted in Jones' *Yellow Music*:

Just as butterflies represent the glory of insectdom, beautiful people represent the cream of humanity. ... China's most beautiful people represent the glory of the Chinese race ... but our custom is to look down on “pretty boys and girls.” [This] could even lead Chinese culture and the Chinese essence into degeneracy.²⁴

Mei Lanfang and Qi Rushan also enshrine beauty. Mei combined three existing *dan*-roles that centered on sexuality (*huadan* 花旦), moral integrity (*qingyi* 青衣) and martial skills (*daomadan* 刀馬旦) into a new role-type, the *huashan*. Combining these aspects enabled Mei to perform parts that were well-rounded and could compete with the hitherto most popular role-type, that of the *laosheng* 老生, for respectable, senior male roles. Mei also innovated curtains, costumes (such as the fish-scale dress for Concubine Yu) and added dances (such as the sword dance in *Farewell My Concubine*). Qi juxtaposed Peking Opera's beautification 美術化 to the realism of Western theatre.²⁵ Moreover, newspapers organized contests to have readers select the most beautiful male *dan*. These contests adopted century-old traditions of listings, such as the “flower registers” in brothels, to the

²¹ Ho 1993:61. Cf. Kar 2004:233, Steen 2000:128n9, Jones 2001:134. *The Lives of Republican Women as Songs* sums a whole list of bullied and often suicidal movie stars in this period (Wang 2004a:167).

²² For Li Jinhui see Jones 2001:88. For Zhou Xuan see Jones 2001:126. For Mei Lanfang, see Zou 2006:90.

²³ Jones 2001:126.

²⁴ Jones 2001:89 (his translation).

²⁵ Goldstein 1999:385.

newly emerged mass media. In doing so, this development foreshadowed the emergence of celebrity culture and anticipated the star system that characterizes Chinese popular music.²⁶

§3 The Talent

Where does the popular equation of entertainment with *yin* and beauty leave displays of masculinity? Marc Moskowitz argues in *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow* (2010):

Mandapop revolves on several axes ... and in each case *yin* seems to be victorious over *yang* ... Women have become the cultural ideal for what the majority of Chinese hope to be.²⁷

Moskowitz writes these words about the new millennium, but in earlier decades, too, mandapop only sporadically legitimized itself by appealing to the *yang*-world of politics. Until the 1970s, almost all mandapop singers were female, stressing their *yin*-position with respect to the gaze of the audience. The few male singers, such as Yan Hua and Yao Min, cultivated the sound-image-text of the young student, often in duets with female singers.²⁸

Besides the Chinese gender type of dangerous/desirable *yin*-Lady with which Oriole Cui struggles, in student Zhang *The Western Wing* also offers a locus classicus of the male gender type of the young student, or better, the talent.²⁹ Compared to the scholar or gentleman, the talent is immature and hence more susceptible to the lures of *yin*. Both the talent and the scholar's prowess are based on *wen* 文, 'civil, sophisticated,' as distinct from *wu* 武, 'martial' abilities.

The talent is sometimes perceived as fragile and effeminate, also within China, because of his good looks, youthfulness and particularly because of his *wenrou* 溫柔, 'tenderness, gentleness.'³⁰ However, Baranovitch, following Kam Louie, argues that sophisticated-*wen* is definitely masculine, and Moskowitz also concludes that "the *wenrou* male should not be seen as lacking masculinity in the context of Mandapop."³¹ To explore the slippages and ambiguities between gentle-*wenrou*, femininity and homosexuality, I will consider the performances of the Hong Kong singer Leslie Cheung, also because Moskowitz' informants describe Cheung as the paradigmatic *wenrou* performer.³²

²⁶ Zeitlin 2006:86.

²⁷ Moskowitz 2010:87, Cf. 29. Cf. Baranovitch 2003:110.

²⁸ Sun 2004a:113, 125, Cf. 150, 188, 189.

²⁹ Song 2004:27.

³⁰ Song 2004. Baranovitch 2003:112. A related term is *yinrou* 陰柔 'yin-softness, accommodating,' which is the antonym of *yanggang* 陽剛 'yang-toughness, stern.'

³¹ Moskowitz 2010:101. Baranovitch 2003:133.

³² Moskowitz 2010:92.

Dandy

In the 1960s, the Beatles and other rock bands proved to Hong Kong youngsters that men could sing pop songs too. Hong Kong male singers soon dropped the initial link with the *yang*-world of politics. Whereas Sam Hui has frequently addressed social issues since the 1970s, often in a soothing, descriptive vein, Alan Tam's repertoire in the 1970s and 1980s already consisted exclusively of soft love songs, and Leslie Cheung's performances between 1983 and 2003 can be seen as developing this movement.³³ Natalia Chan writes:

[Cheung] led us into a new age of total feminization and redefined the beauty of men's femininity.³⁴

Cheung had an extensive and versatile career as both singer and actor. I follow Chan's characterization of Cheung's star persona in the 1980s as a dandy.³⁵

Like the talent, the dandy is good-looking, middle-class, and prey to fits of infatuation 痴情. However, at the same time the dandy has cosmopolitan connotations, given the term's French and British origins. This not only suits 1980s, British-occupied Hong Kong, but also the biography of Cheung, who was sent to a boarding school in England at the age of thirteen.

Secondly, the dandy's absorption with clothing and physical beauty also resonates with Cheung's star persona. Cheung's father was a tailor whose customers included American actors such as William Holden and Cary Grant. For a short time, Cheung himself studied textile management at the University of Leeds. In *Leslie Cheung: Butterfly of Forbidden Colors* 張國榮：禁色的蝴蝶 (2009), Natalia Chan describes Cheung's transformation from expensive suits in the mid-1980s, through his successful introduction of the still meticulously designed 'casual look' in Hong Kong, to the increasingly extravagant and decadent outfits of the 1990s and 2000s.

PINING MAN 怨男 (1996, clip 2003) shows a lawyer, a policeman, a mechanic and others taking off their uniforms after office hours, changing into brightly colored, outrageous outfits and going to a party where Leslie Cheung sings "without love how can pinning men be human 做人."³⁶ This brings us to a third aspect of the dandy: decadence, and the dandy's ethical and sexual ambiguity. PINING MAN was published on *Red* 紅 (1996), the album which marked Cheung's return as a singer after a silence of six years during which he focused on his acting career.³⁷ His film roles, and by extension his public persona, had

³³ For info on Sam Hui, see Wong 1990:65-81, Man 1998. See Wong 1990:85, 86 on the intervening stars. On Alan Tam, see Wong 1990:73-79, 83.

³⁴ Chan 2005.

³⁵ Chan 2004, Luo 2009: 57. Wong 1990 calls Cheung a yuppie.

³⁶ Luo 2009:54

³⁷ Cooperation with lyricist Lam Chik and producer C.Y. Kong. The tour included a show in Amsterdam between May 12 (London) and 25 (Perth) 1997.

become more openly sexually ambiguous, developing inclinations of the dandy in the direction of the diva.

In the 1980s Cheung had acted morally ambivalent roles, often *huahua gongzi* 花花公子, 'flowery aristocratic youngsters,' a term usually translated as *playboy* that has stronger heterosexual connotations than the dandy. Both 12th Young Master of Stanley Kwan's *Rouge* 胭脂扣 (1988) and Yuddy in Wong Kar-wai's *Days of Being Wild* 阿飛正傳 (1990) are unreliable seducers. In the 1990s Cheung explored gender confusion. In *Farewell My Concubine* (1993, d. Chen Kaige), a film that fictionalized parts of Mei Lanfang's biography, Cheung portrayed the unrequited love of a male *dan* for his male stage partner. In *He's a Woman, She's a Man* 金枝玉葉 (1994, d. Peter Chan), Cheung played a songwriter who falls in love with a male singer who in the end turns out to be a female singer in disguise. Natalia Chan argues that Cheung's acting and biography add a layer of meaning and ambiguity to what are otherwise homophobic films and that "these are roles that could not have been performed by anyone else but Leslie Cheung."³⁸ Additionally, Helen Leung argues in *Undercurrents* that Cheung's contributions to Hong Kong queer culture lie, not in a bold coming-out, but in offering an ambiguous space constructed through cross-references between film roles and his star persona.³⁹

Throughout the 1990s, the Hong Kong tabloid press reported aggressively on Cheung's sexuality. This dominated the news to the extent that Huang Shujun sings in *CHANGING 1995 改變1995* (2001), which recapitulates 1990s, "Leslie Cheung finally happily admits he's a gay." Nevertheless, despite many hints of homosexuality, Cheung stopped short of going against Confucian family values.⁴⁰ Even his dedication of Teresa Teng's *THE MOON FOR MY HEART* 月亮代表我的心 "to the two most important people in my life" at a concert in 1997, which is generally considered as his coming-out, was indirect. Leung writes:

The first person Cheung mentioned was his mother, whom he affectionately addressed among the audience. "The second person," Cheung continued, still addressing his mother, "is someone who has stood by me for more than ten years, who selflessly supported me when I was down and out, even lent me several months of his salary so I could survive. Of course you know who it is I'm talking about: it's my good friend, your 'bond-son' (*qizai* [契仔]) Mr. Tong" ... Not only had Cheung insistently embedded queer kinship within the familial structure, but he had routed queer relation through his mother while reclaiming injurious and insulting terms (by ironically adopting the tabloid address of "Mr. Tong" and by implicitly acknowledging Tong as his *qidi* [bond-younger brother]).⁴¹

³⁸ Luo 2009:103.

³⁹ Leung 2008:91-95

⁴⁰ Luo 2009:53

⁴¹ Leung 2008: 98-99

Despite cross-references and synergy, Cheung is not his film roles or his stage persona. Natalia Chan's equation of actor and role – reiterating Chinese sayings such as 'person and play are one' 人戲合一 and 'life's like a play' 人生如戲 – signify the desire of the fan, projecting depth into the idol.⁴² She willfully falls prey to Lilian Lee's romanticism. Lee wrote the novels on which *Rouge* and *Farewell My Concubine* are based, and both stories invite the viewer to confuse fantasy and on-stage reality, and by extension (mise-en-scène) to confuse them with outside reality.

A Tango of Idolization and Identification

In the canso, the troubadour eulogizes his inaccessible Lady. For Oedipus, a locus classicus of psychoanalysis, his mother is his Lady, and the evil powers that separate him from her are his father, both in person (King Laius) and sublimated as the prohibiting Law-of-the-Father. Freud calls Oedipus' desire to have his mother *Objektbesetzung*, 'object cathexis, possession by a psychic or libidinal energy directed at an object.' I will call this 'idolization.' By contrast, Oedipus' relationship with his father is defined by the desire to become, in other words, by symbolic identification.

These relations are diametrically opposed: idolization stresses distance and difference, and identification ignores distance and difference. However, Freud also writes that young children start out bisexually, oscillating between desiring and identifying with both parents until they learn the Law-of-the-Father.⁴³ In the next pages I argue that Leslie Cheung, and by extension pop stardom, simultaneously provide fantasies of idolization (having the star, making love to him or her) and symbolic identification (being the star, leading his or her glamorous life).⁴⁴

The percussion intro of RED sounds through the dark Hong Kong Coliseum.⁴⁵ Cheers of recognition. The suspense is enhanced by the motionless, blindfolded models, clad in black leather, lace, feathers, rising in couples on elevating platforms on the now dimly lit stage. They caress each other, hardly discernible through the mist. Leslie Cheung changes clothes in the middle of the group of models. A synthesizer violin theme breaks the rhythm. This bridge ends with a bass chord on the piano. Leslie Cheung in black pants and jacket with shiny black pearl inlays. The lower part of his body. Red pumps. Close-up of the shoes, as if we are kneeling. Cheung with arms crossed in a pose of careless waiting. Rising still, his face: short hair shows his earpiece and microphone, brightest red lips. After letting us wait for two and a half minutes, finally: "Red..." Cheung calmly sings the obscure text to the low, drawn-out melodies of the first verse and chorus, accompanied by shots of his lips and graciously moving hands, diamond ring. "You are the reddest wound, perhaps..."

⁴² Luo 2009:102, 134.

⁴³ Freud 1955:261.

⁴⁴ These distinctions relate to Lacan's "having the Phallus" and "being the Phallus." Cf. Middleton 2006:91-135, Butler 1990:138-172.

⁴⁵ Description on the basis of Leslie Cheung's live DVD *Across 97* 跨越 97, 1' 17-1' 25.



Illustration 3.6: Leslie Cheung and Zhu Yonglong dancing the tango during RED as part of the Across 97 tour.

As dancer Zhu Yonglong turns pirouettes, long black drapes fly around his naked chest. He follows Leslie Cheung, who doesn't look back, across the stage. Only Zhu and Cheung are standing erect. Cheung sings the second verse and chorus: "Red, as flames of arrogance flickering through the years." At the end of the chorus the music recedes (1' 21' 30). Zhu and Cheung dance facing each other, both backed by a group of models. They circle, mirror each other's movements, pose in narcissistic self-embrace, walk up to each other. Cheung pushes Zhu's arm aside, straightens his jacket and walks on to sing the first verse again. Only then does he accept Zhu Yonglong's hand. They meet cheek to cheek for the tango (1' 22' 30). Cheung wraps his body around Zhu several times, sits on his lap. Shots of red pumps and black leather shoes. Cheung rubbing his back up to Zhu's chest, leading Zhu's hands to massage his loins. Turning around and bringing his face up to Zhu's. Suddenly and violently pushing him away (1' 23' 24). Cheung lies down elegantly and lifts up his feet. The models surround him, one male model

changes Cheung's high heels for shiny black boots, caresses his legs, helps him up. Again Cheung pushes him away. Smiling deviously at Zhu, Cheung throws him a piece of jewelry as the music fades (1' 24' 12). When the stage lights go on again, Leslie Cheung has abandoned what appears to have been a role, to cheerfully thank Zhu Yonglong for his choreography.⁴⁶

This performance of RED is part of the Across 97 跨越97 tour, which consisted of 55 concerts between December 12th 1996 and June 17th 1997. The DVD of the tour also includes Cheung's version of THE MOON FOR MY HEART. In this performance of RED, Cheung performs the Lady. The bright red colors, shiny diamonds, spotlight and microphone place Cheung in the center of attention. At the same time the dance movements, bottom-up camera shots, perfect beauty and diva-like behavior put Cheung out of reach and render him enigmatic. The role of the dancers is ambivalent. On the one hand, they are voiceless and faceless stand-ins for the desiring audience. On the other hand, the caressing and obedience of the dancers stresses that Cheung is in control, that his word is law. This invites identification with his position.

⁴⁶ Chan 2005. Luo 2009:96.

RED's ambiguity is representative of Cheung's music between 1995 and his suicide in 2003. Its interplay of gazes, including homo-eroticism, narcissism and inhabiting the position of the Lady can also be found in the clip of DREAMING OF THE INNER RIVER 梦到内河 (2001), in which Cheung photographs the Japanese ballet dancer Nishijima Kazuhiro. The clip was briefly banned in Hong Kong for "promoting homosexuality."⁴⁷

Across 1997 contains a number of songs that refer to Cheung's film roles, including *Farewell My Concubine*. The performance of RED was most likely inspired by a tango scene in *Happy Together* 春光乍洩 (1997, d. Wong Kar-wai), which was shot in late 1996. In that scene Ho Po-Wing (Leslie Cheung) teaches tango steps to Lai Yiu-fai (Tony Leung) during their stay in Buenos Aires (34' 46). The tango relates to the soon-ending happiest time of the gay couple.

Casual clothes. Clumsy movement through the small room. White bandages on Ho's hands light up. No faces, the only light comes through the window. Ho gestures that Lai should practice the steps and goes to sit in front of the television, which has been murmuring in the background. Cut. "Yeah, I'm ready," gesturing Ho to come over. "Can't be." As they start dancing, we are at the same level as their faces. Close together, step, turn. First sounds of the TANGO APASSIONADO: FINALE by Astor Piazzolla, a repetitive theme on piano supported by a steady bass. Almost immediately (35' 29) a cloudy sky over a "stinking oil-slicked port called La Boca."⁴⁸ A high solo on the bandoneón (35' 39). Lai and Ho dancing amongst the garbage in the dirty, neon-lit kitchen, increasingly entwined. No camera movement. Registration of how Ho bends over backwards, how he throws his body at Lai, who leads. Ho turns fewer pirouettes. Only an intimate swaying of the hips. Ho puts one hand under Lai's sleeveless shirt, on his chest. Almost motionless now. First Ho turns his head away, strokes through Lai's hair. Then he answers Lai's kisses. Touching each other frantically. The sound of a ringing telephone doesn't succeed in penetrating the music. Cut to Lai in the night, outside the tango bar he used to work at (36' 47), the music – "meant to be played by half-drunk musicians in a bordello" according to Piazzolla – goes on as if they are still dancing.⁴⁹

Happy Together shows more intimacy and messiness than RED, partly due to the medium. In tune



Illustration 3.7: Ho Po-Wing (Leslie Cheung) teaches tango steps to Lai Yiu-fai (Tony Leung) in *Happy Together* (1997).

⁴⁷ Luo 2009:90, 117.

⁴⁸ Doyle 1996:30.

⁴⁹ Paraphrasing producer Kip Hanrahan (Hanrahan 1993).

with Wong Kar-wai's oeuvre, the tango scene presents nostalgia: the more intimately Lai and Ho dance, the more intense the looming feeling of inevitable loss, of the minimal distance that is unsurpassable. Lai provides the voice-over of *Happy Together* and thus presents the main point of identification. His narrative revolves around his desire for Ho and the impossibility of their being happy together. Ho (Leslie Cheung) makes impossible demands (like a superego), but is also vulnerable and in need of nursing.⁵⁰

Both tangos perform the minimal distance of bodies and fantasies. They function on the basis of belief: "Yes I know it's not true, but *what if* he was so close that he could croon into my ear."⁵¹ The *what if* is the minimal distance that enables identification, while securing inaccessibility and thus idolization and possession.

§4 Toughness

Leslie Cheung shows that *wenrou*-gentleness can be successfully mobilized to perform queer identities. However, this does not mean that *wen* masculinity is inherently gay or effeminate. It is central also to ostentatiously heterosexual singers. Now I will turn to tougher gender roles, developing Oedipus' violent streak. Rather than with Moskowitz' hypermasculinity, I juxtapose sophisticated-*wen* with martial-*wu*. Whereas *wen* masculinity dominates mainstream pop, the *wu* masculinity of horse-riding knight-errants 武俠, invincible kung fu masters and fearless mafiosi has inspired pop's challengers, including Beijing rock musicians, Hong Kong rappers, and Taiwanese musicians singing in Taiwanese rather than Mandarin.⁵² Hanggai, LMF and Wu Bai are just three striking, relatively recent examples of male artists that couple macho-*wu* to a predominantly rock sound. The rise of male singers in Hong Kong of the 1960s and in Taiwan of the late 1970s was enabled by the introduction in pop music of elements associated with masculinity: band organization, rock and folk sounds and criticality.⁵³ Later, I will discuss loyalty and *wu* masculinity in the Beijing band scene; but first I will investigate images of being cool and tough in mainstream pop – images that empower both men and women.

Faye Wong's Cool

As opposed to the *yin*-related concept of beauty, cool is closer to *yang*. The Chinese *ku* 酷 is a transliteration of the English *cool* and first appeared in Taiwan during the 1970s.

⁵⁰ Cinematographer Christopher Doyle writes in a section called "Leslie Needs Love" about the shooting of a drag-scene that was eventually dropped from the final cut:

Leslie looks great as a red-head, but the darker, modified 'bouffon' is far less 'obvious'. Mother of pearl sunglasses camp him up a bit in high-heels he walks like trick-tired whore.

The make-up looks pasty like a weekend cross-dresser-hide stubble fake.

We like the ensemble. But Leslie is ill at ease ...

"Am I a woman? A real woman?" he asks his mirror more than us.

"You look great Leslie." We all try to sound re-assuring, "Not the slightest bit 'camp'." We stop just short of "Leslie, you're beautiful." I'm sure he can manage to say that much himself (Doyle 1996:40).

⁵¹ Žižek 1992:70, Cf. Žižek 1997:108.

⁵² On these latter, see Moskowitz 2010:35-37.

⁵³ Erni 2004:5-6.

In the PRC it replaced *xiaosa* 潇洒, 'natural and unrestrained,' during the 1990s, introducing stronger connotations of liberalism, such as independence, individuality and indifference. My argument that Faye Wong was crucial in this transition builds on her uneasy relation to stardom and the press as well as her affinities with alternative sounds. I will develop this argument further toward the end of this chapter.

PRC scholars argue that *ku* is at odds with Chinese traditional and official concepts of beauty 美 and perfection 完美, which are seen as the optimistic emulation of and obeisance to a collective ideal.⁵⁴ Wang Bin:

Presently [1998], *ku* has become a widespread format in the cultural market. Many in the film and music business ... wrongly assume that cold beauty 冷艷 is an artistic accomplishment, and lack of facial expression is art. ...

Ku essentially means being a clone filled with the loneliness, frustration and anxiety produced by the present competitiveness. The young generation shouldn't be one of coldness, of perversion. Neither should they see the perverted *ku* as an avant-garde style.⁵⁵

Jeff Smith and Jean Wylie's 2004 article "China's Youth Defining 'Cool'" does not question the cultural translatability of *cool*, but the issue comes up in the survey of 1,200 university students on which the article is based:

We asked the students, "In one sentence please describe what you mean by 'cool'." Just under half of male and female respondents in both Beijing and Shanghai indicated that individuality and innovation make a company cool.

...

Though foreign brands scored near the top in many survey categories, music is one area where they fell short. Asian, not Western, musicians are viewed as cool by this generation. No international pop stars were among students' top 10 favorites. China's Wang Fei [Faye Wong] was the most popular singer, with 17% of the votes.⁵⁶

Additionally, a 1998 Shanghai Radio survey of 6,000 people revealed Aaron Kwok as the coolest male singer, Faye Wong as the coolest female singer and Pepsi-Cola as the coolest drink.⁵⁷ The mention of Pepsi is salient because ever since its debut on the Chinese market in 1982, the brand has collaborated extensively with Chinese pop stars to create a cool image. Their campaigns illustrate the travels of this Afro-American notion in Asia.

⁵⁴ Zhou 2005:33.

⁵⁵ Wang 2001:4.

⁵⁶ Smith 2004:2-3.

⁵⁷ Gao 2006.

In the 1980s, Pepsi campaigned globally with superstars such as Michael Jackson and Madonna, and in Chinese-language areas – starting with Hong Kong – with Leslie Cheung and later Andy Lau. In the early 1990s Pepsi collaborated with another ‘Heavenly God’ of Cantonese pop music, Aaron Kwok, during their new campaign around the slogan 渴望無限, ‘boundless yearning’, a translation of their global slogan ‘Ask for more.’ In 1999 Faye Wong recorded the song EXCELLENCE 精彩 to promote the slogan, and in recent years the brand has continued to seek endorsement by pop stars, including Sammi Cheng and Jay Chou.

The lyrics of EXCELLENCE express the shift of an esthetics of perfection to one of sublime coolness:

最好有心理准备
拯救灵魂的枯萎
你和我还有机会
拨乱反正 弄清是非

You’d better be prepared
to redeem your soul’s withering.
You and I still have a chance
to shatter rights and wrongs, to sort out true and false.

你渴望 我期待
美好灿烂的未来
不完美 也要精彩
可怎么做的说的想的要的不止那么多

You yearn for, I look forward to
the bright and brilliant future.
Perfect or not, excelling is a must,
but how to do it, say it, think it, want it,
doesn’t matter so much.

每一刻都存在
不一样的精彩
每一刻都存在
不一样的精彩

Every moment exists...
a different excellence.
Every moment exists...
a different excellence.

爱总是左右难为
梦永远是种点缀
你和我 坚持过几回
偶而妥协 拒绝后悔

Love is always elusive and difficult,
an eternal embroidery of dreams.
You and I have persisted sometimes,
compromise occasionally, refuse to regret.

Jay Chou’s Diao-Phallus

Since Faye Wong stopped recording studio albums in 2003, Jay Chou has been the prime example of a cool pop star. However, Chou himself rather opts for *diao* 屌 as the secret of his success.⁵⁸ From *Time Asia*’s 2003 cover story *Cool Jay*:

Finally, he leans in close: “Let me tell you about diao.”

Diao is Taiwanese slang usually translated as “cool” or “outrageous.” It literally means “penis.”

⁵⁸ Since it is oral slang, written representations vary: 屌, 吊 and DIAO are all used.

“It’s my personal philosophy,” he explains, “but it has nothing to do with religion. It means that whatever you do, you don’t try to follow others. Go your own way, you know?”

He sits back, shakes his hair out of his eyes and nods. This is serious. This is deep. This is the metaphysical mechanism that he feels explains his pop stardom, as opposed to his musical talent. “It’s like, the ability to shock. The way I think of shocking people is to do things that people don’t expect in my music, in my performances. Like during my first Taipei show last year, I was performing Long Quan (Dragon Fist) (Chou’s favorite tune from his Eight Dimensions CD [(2002)]) and I took off on a harness and flew out over the audience. That was diao.”⁵⁹

The lyrics of *DRAGON FIST* (2002) are full of macho Chinese imagery.⁶⁰ The video clip strengthens the *wu* heroism and brands Pepsi. It starts with kung fu monks dressed in blue pants practicing moves to a Chinese drum intro in a monastery called Dragon *Wu* Academy 龍武館. As the master leaves, saying “This is for you,” and distorted electric guitars play the main harmony of the song, Jay Chou jumps in mid-air to catch the nameplate of the monastery. Next he uses his superhuman powers to reveal a hidden refrigerator stashed with blue cans. The monks cheer, and run up to the camera. Jay Chou starts summing up Chinese cultural symbols in the verse. The bridge links the rise of China to a transformation of masculinity:

渴望著血脈相通無限個千萬弟兄
我把天地拆封將長江水掏空
人在古老河床蛻變中～～

我 右拳打開了天化身為龍

把 山河重新移動填平裂縫
將 東方的日出調整了時空



Illustration 3.8: Jay Chou in the video clip of *DRAGON FIST* (2002).

Yearning to be united in blood with endless⁶¹
millions of brothers, I tear apart the universe’s
seal, drain the Yangtze river.
Man is mutating on ancient river beds!

My right hand opens heaven.
I transform into a dragon,
grab landscapes for remobilizing, balances crack.
Let the Oriental sunrise reconfigure time-space

⁵⁹ Drake 2003.

⁶⁰ The lyrics are by Chou’s main lyricist Vincent Fang.

⁶¹ Subtle reference to Pepsi’s slogan 渴望無限 ‘endless yearning.’

回到洪荒 去支配 去操縱

back to primordial chaos, to domination,
to manipulation.

我 右拳打開了天化身為龍

My right hand opens heaven,
I transform into a dragon.

那 大地心臟洶湧不安跳動
全 世界的表情只剩下一種
等待英雄 我就是那個龍

That earth's heart churns, pounds restlessly,
the whole world's expression narrowed to one.
Await the hero. I am that dragon.

The title of the song is reminiscent of the Japanese anime series *Dragon Ball-Z*, and the rest of the clip pictures Jay Chou as a super kung fu hero fighting cartoon monsters. Yu Liang makes grateful use of *DRAGON FIST* and its visual presentation in commercials, clips and fan-made Internet animations to accuse Jay Chou of being a child only interested in playing 玩, entertaining dreams of egotistic heroism that go against the true *wu* values of loyalty and are therefore un-Chinese.⁶² However, not only was *DRAGON FIST* selected by a USA soft drink company, in 2004 Jay Chou also performed it on the major PRC state television event, the CCTV Chinese New Year show. CCTV had no problem with the prominence of the ego-hero in the song, and only demanded that Chou articulate better.⁶³

Chou combines tough *wu*-masculinity with a traditional view of the family and romanticism in a way that is reminiscent of clichéd Mediterranean machismo, romanticism and family values. At times this brings Jay Chou close to *wen* masculinity, in his many R&B ballads, through the milk-drinking cowboy he portrays in *ON THE RUN*, “coz beer harms the body,” and in *LISTEN TO MOTHER 聽媽媽的話* (2006) when he shares with a young fan the Confucian mantra of obeisance to seniors.

Host: “Can you describe yourself in one sentence?”

Chou: “Super diao.” ...

Host: “What do you like best in a man?”

Chou: “Individuality.”

Host: “And what about women?”

Chou: “They shouldn’t be too individual. I want girls to be reliant, of the dependent little bird type.”

Host: “What do you think is most important in a friend?”

Chou: “To believe in brotherly loyalty 義氣”

Host: “The *ku*-lest scene in *The Curse of the Golden Flower* 黃金甲 (2006, d. Zhang Yimou)?”

Chou: “The ending with all the soldiers and horses fighting and murdering. I like the aesthetics of violence best.” ...

⁶² Yu 2005a, Yu 2005b.

⁶³ CCTV 2004, around 23:30. Jay Chou did add a sword dance and the first sentence of the *wen*-student Liang Shanbo in the ‘Chinese Romeo and Juliet’ *The Butterfly Lovers* 梁山伯與祝英台.

Host: “Why did you bring your mother to see *The Curse of the Golden Flower*?”

Chou: “Because my mum likes seeing Slick-Hair Chow.”

Host: “Is there anything you want to say to your mother at this moment?”

Chou: “Thanks for having me.”⁶⁴

§5 Rivals and Brothers

Baranovitch interprets the “the fascination with the macho, Rambo-like, tough, masculine image among Chinese rockers” in the PRC as a reaction against the gender-erasure of the Revolutionary Era (1949-1978).⁶⁵ In the 1980s, male intellectuals in the PRC sought to assert their power and *wu*-masculinity. However, the 1989 massacre “was an act of castration whose purpose it was to place China’s intellectuals back in their traditional position of woman-like state subjects.”⁶⁶ The official acceptance of popular music (first as *tongsu*) since 1986 helped in “fostering nonrebellious, obedient, docile male state-subjects.”⁶⁷ In other words, according to Baranovitch, rock’s rebelliousness is not only political, but also sexual. I have addressed (political) rebelliousness in the previous chapter. Rather than addressing rock’s sexual subversion directly, I will now outline the style and importance of male bonding in the Beijing band scene.

Homosociality

The metal band Tang Dynasty are generally seen as “emblems of patriotism and Chinese masculinity,” as Cynthia Wong writes:

[Kaiser] Kuo reveled in his “womanizing rock star” persona ... [he] was a great rock guitar player and to top it all off, he was a sex object.⁶⁸

Tang Dynasty present themselves as objects/causes of desire, and at the same time reenact *wu* masculine ideals of brotherhood. Intrigued by knight-errant plots, they called their second album *Epic* in English, a free translation of its Chinese title *yanyi* 演義 ‘performing righteousness,’ with righteousness traditionally referring to loyalty among brothers.⁶⁹ Kaiser Kuo:

We all had long hair and we were big, tall guys. One day, we [guitar player Ding, bass player Zhang Ju and guitarist Kaiser Kuo] got the idea that it would be cool to pull our hair up in topknots, like men used to in the ancient days, so we got these strips of leather and tied it up. We walked around the city [of Beijing] like

⁶⁴ Zhang 2006.

⁶⁵ Baranovitch 2003:118, 133.

⁶⁶ Baranovitch 2003:141.

⁶⁷ Baranovitch 2003:142.

⁶⁸ Wong 2005:153, 179. Cf. De Kloet 2010:55-56.

⁶⁹ For more on the centrality of *yi* to *wu* masculinity, see Louie 2002:36-37. See Wong 2005:185 on Kuo’s choice of *Epic* over *Romance* in the English caption of the album.

that all day. We joked that we were the three blood brothers [of the *Sanguo Yanyi* 三國演義, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*].⁷⁰

The Beijing band scene of the 1990s was based on homosocial relationships that empowered (ideologically) male insiders at the cost of estranging outsiders and especially women. Cynthia Wong experienced difficulties doing fieldwork for her PhD. In her introduction she quotes Kuo as saying: “Cynthia, you are so stupid! If a woman just comes up and talks to me, I think she wants to fuck me.”

In other words, this code of righteousness values the bond between men over that between a man and a woman, in a similar way to Savigliano’s characterization of tango:

Tango is not about sex – at least not about heterosexuality – it is about love, but love and sensuality (according to our previous informants) are queer preoccupations. Hence, macho men only care about the true passion of male friendship ... and they are obsessed by the judgments of their male peers ... which, in turn, frequently revolve around their ways of relating to woman.⁷¹

In the discussion of Xiao He’s SIMPLE TRUTH at the beginning of this chapter, I focused on the performer/protagonist and his desired Lady. However, the canso include a third, male party, which anticipates the role of the audience.⁷² Xiao He doesn’t perform SIMPLE TRUTH for his Lady but for the audience, whose indispensability is illustrated by the fact that the song was recorded live. SIMPLE TRUTH is an invitation to collectively heap abuse on the Lady, to feel relieved from wanting her and to feel protected by a collective that structurally has the upper hand, i.e. is in the *yang*-position.⁷³

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick starts her book on male homosocial relations in English literature by

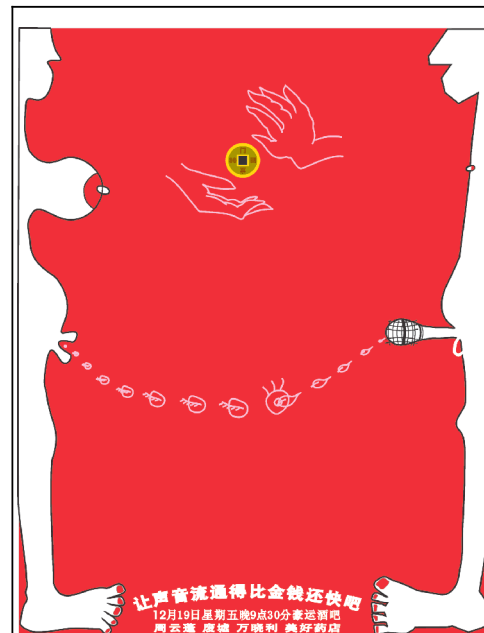


Illustration 3.9: Poster of a show of Zhou Yunpeng, Ruins, Wan Xiaoli and Glorious Pharmacy in the Get Lucky bar on December 19th 2003. The slogan at the bottom reads “Let sound circulate faster than money.”

⁷⁰ Wong 2005:171. To Tang Dynasty, “height becomes yet another means of constructing and asserting their masculinity” (Baranovitch 2003:118).

⁷¹ Savigliano 1995:45.

⁷² Cholakian 1990:1.

⁷³ Even Xiao He. His almost inaudible “sorry” before his final “the world however won’t stop turning, because you’re gone” can be taken literally as the apology of a bohemian for not abiding by the Law-of-the-Father.

proposing the erotic triangle.⁷⁴ She warns that this erotic triangle is neither symmetrical nor ahistorical, and consequently Song Geng argues:

Although the “erotic triangle” in Sedgwick’s sense also exists in Chinese literature, the homosocial relationship in traditional Chinese culture was characterized by the absence of women. What ties men together, in most cases, was the ideological articulation of justice and righteousness ... [Moreover,] since heterosexual love poses a threat to the bonds among men, the homosocial discourse adopts a hostile attitude toward woman and heterosexuality.⁷⁵

Song Geng contrasts this discourse of male loyalty and knight errants with the ‘talent and beauty’ story.⁷⁶ Below I will investigate the conflict between homosocial loyalty and heterosexual desire, which Baranovitch calls “the crisis of masculinity.”⁷⁷

The Gap between Loyalty and Desire

Where Tang Dynasty (and more recently Hanggai) elicit identification with the mythical *wu* man, both *The Master Says* and *Second Hand Rose* sing of the displacement of brotherhood 兄弟 in contemporary China. For *The Master Says*, the primary site of righteousness is not an on-stage macho pose, but lyrical description of friends talking and drinking. *VESSEL 磁器* (1997) is still an outright celebration of brotherhood: it sings of brothers as “potatoes cooked to mash” and “figures made of the same clay.” *THE WAY OF WINE 酒道* (1997) is more critical:

活著是為錢兒啊？	Do you live for money?
死了那是為道！	You death, well, that’s because of the Way!
世態人情薄似紗，	Attitudes and emotions are slight as gauze.
要是自個兒跌倒了得自個兒爬，	If you fall by yourself, you have to pick yourself up.
莫靠拉！	No support!
交了許多的好朋友，	I made lots of good friends,
全是烟、酒、茶，	all with cigarettes, wine, tea.
一旦有事兒去找他...	But if once you knock on their door for help...
他不在家，他不在家	he’s not at home, he’s not at home.

The Master Says hardly ever invite straightforward identification with a protagonist. They maintain a critical distance through a combination of maxims, ridicule, references

⁷⁴ Sedgwick uses ‘homosocial desire,’ but I prefer the term ‘homosocial relationships’ to avoid confusion with the Lacanian notion of desire I use throughout this chapter (Sedgwick 1985:21).

⁷⁵ Song 2004:174-5. Sedgwick argues that the erotic triangle is only “for making graphically intelligible *the play of desire and identification* by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment” (Sedgwick 1985:27, italics added).

⁷⁶ Despite proposing an exciting reading of *The Western Chamber* as increasingly constructed around male rivalry (as transposed social antagonism), with Oriole Cui symbolizing fame.

⁷⁷ Baranovitch 2003:112. De Kloet 2010:104-105.

to social perception (marriage, sacrifice), wordplay and shifts in focalization. NIMA NAGE 妮玛娜格(2002) deals with the aftermath of a divorce: Qiu Ye first sings about “releasing all my fiery passion 欲火” in a guitar solo, and then recounts his attempts at pacifying his sexual frustration in a karaoke bar. A chorus of escort ladies sings a nursery rhyme in which they ridicule the protagonist for his poverty, crudely interrupting this fantasy. Consequently we don’t get the protagonist’s reaction, but a patronizing speech by an unknown “older brother” who is most likely employed by the karaoke parlor/brothel:

大哥起身慢細語說是
二弟二弟別生氣
這妹妹本是良家的
迫於生活才
咱們出來耍的一定要
懂得憐香惜玉
二弟誒你沒問題
她這妹妹沒問題

Big brother gets up, speaks slowly and carefully.
‘Don’t be angry, little brother.
In fact, this sister came from a respectable family
only cause she was forced to make a living...
We who come to fool around surely should know
how to comfort the fragrant.
Little brother, hey, you’ve got no problem.
This sister, she’s got no problem.’

The song NIMA NAGE, as well as the escort lady of that name in the song, shows the complexities of loyalty and desire in contemporary Chinese society. It ends with big brother calmly repeating “no problem” now and then as the singer screams frantically over a parodied disco beat, indicating the emotional despair of participating in the debauchery of modern society. The protagonist of the song is a victim of the erosion of ideals (divorce, cold economics), but he also actively participates in it by frequenting the karaoke bars and discos. Rock music serves as a release for anxiety and frustration, but songs like NIMA NAGE also reproach men, albeit indirectly, for their impotence and weakness.

Most Luscious

Whereas the soap opera *Migrant Workers of Subsistence* 生存之民工 (2005, d. Guan Hu) is melodramatic, Second Hand Rose’s end-credit track song FATE (SUBSISTENCE) 命運 (生存) treats the suffering of migrant people through tragicomedy.⁷⁸ The upbeat song starts with a wife whining “Oh, fate!” and the rest of the lyrics are true to the humor of the Northeast cabaret tradition of Two-Taking-Turns. A flash-media clip of the song depicts a poor guy getting increasingly hyperbolic beatings after time and again failing to take revenge on a mafia boss (with the characters dressed as stock figures of Hong Kong *wu*-dominated film genres), only to finally succeed and end up in jail.

Second Hand Rose goes beyond *The Master Says* by ridiculing *wu* masculinity directly. This farcicality 嬉皮滑稽, as Huang Liaoyuan calls it, is consistent with the

⁷⁸ The intro shows migrant workers complaining over indefinitely delayed payments, ending with premier Wen Jiabao addressing the central issue: “Enterprises and managers that refuse to pay back wages to migrant rural workers must be held accountable in accordance with the law.” The series is set in Northeast China, features Two-Taking-Turns performances and stars Xue Cun.

clowning and double-entendres of Two-Taking-Turns and with Second Hand Rose's challenge to the rock mythology.⁷⁹ In REVELATIONS OF A QUEST FOR MARRIAGE 征婚启示 (2003), Liang Long sings of himself as impregnated by an artist and by art.

Playfully addressing sexuality also benefits Second Hand Rose's marketability. For the small-scale Plug One Half 插一半 Show on Valentine's Day 2009, they advertised with the following entrance fees:

Couples: married 100, lovers 90, homosexuals 80, extra-marital affairs 70, twice-married 60.

Singles: 50.

Tickets come with a free 'Trojan Horse' condom.

I will address humor in the next chapter. Behind their parodies and cynicism, what is Second Hand Rose's take on masculinity and its crisis?

FATE (SUBSISTENCE) cynically portrays today's world as a dangerous place comparable to the mythical *jianghu* 江湖 or 'marshes and lakes' through which knight-errants roam. The title song of their second album, ENTERTAINMENT *JIANGHU* 娛樂江湖 (2006), develops this theme to criticize the fierce competition in the entertainment industry. It starts with a nursery rhyme:

兩只小蜜蜂，飛在花叢中， Two little bees fly amongst the flowers.
飛來又飛去，愛情一場空。 Flying left and right, love cannot be found.
人在江湖飄，那能不挨刀， Men roam *jianghu* and can't avoid the sword.
一刀砍死你，砍完砍自己。 Killing you in a single stroke, I'll start killing myself,

...

萬一是親戚呢 萬一是朋友呢 What if it's your relative, what if it's your friend?
萬一是愛人呢 萬一是自己呢 What if it's your lover, what if it's yourself?

In contrast to the *jianghu* romanticized in knight-errant novels and kung fu cinema, Second Hand Rose use *jianghu* to argue that contemporary society lacks loyalty and love. *Wu* homosocial bonds have withered in contemporary China, and Second Hand Rose find this deplorable but inevitable. The title ENTERTAINMENT *JIANGHU* can also be read as 'enjoying *jianghu*.'

In their more serious moments, Second Hand Rose oscillate between a pathetic longing for idyllic love – under the virtual moonlight of PEACH ORCHARD OF THE E-ERA E時代桃園 (2006), where happiness and eternity are downloadable, and during the spring or erotic dreams of STORY OF SPRING 春天的故事 (2006) – on the one hand, and the perverse 'realism' of accepting a stand-in, on the other. "Wouldn't it be more heroic if we could live on love," sings Liang Long in PICKING FLOWERS (2003), a story of unexpected pregnan-

⁷⁹ Both in personal communication Huang Liaoyuan, August 2006, and New Vision 2006:18' 05.

cy, pragmatic marriage and the impossibility of predestined love.⁸⁰ At other moments Second Hand Rose temporarily solve the tension between desire and reality by offering music itself as a sublime fantasy that gives access to *jouissance* and shields off the traumatic real.⁸¹ For instance the repeated “I’d like to sing you a song” of PICKING FLOWERS, the chorus of BUT I’M STILL SINGING 可是我还是在歌唱 (2006) and the theme of dancing in VOODOO DANCE 跳大神 (2006) celebrate the strength of musical performance as a metaphor for life.

Due to the absence of humor, GOOD FLOWER RED 好花紅(2003) combines aggressive male desire and beauty’s inaccessibility most clearly:

好花紅那個紅又艷呢	Good flower red, it’s red and gorgeous.
誰不願那個騙她入胸懷	Who doesn’t want to deceive her into his arms,
一層層扒下去讓嫩的露出來	stripping layer after layer, revealing the tender parts?
卻說情不變花也不會敗	Yet to say that love never changes
	is like saying flowers never succumb.

Usually, however Second Hand Rose question machismo through their prominent use of red roses, the slogan “the most luscious band in Chinese rock,” and the drag act of lead singer Liang Long.

At first I dressed up in a matchmaker’s outfit, the outfit of those meddlers that are go-betweens in marriages. I put my hair in a big bun and covered it with a net, one of those black hair-nets old ladies use. Painted a mole, both cheeks brightly red and I’d get on stage. Whenever I saw myself in the mirror I was shocked, and almost threw up. Very, very ugly, but also with the power to shock. A lot of people liked my [appearance] back then, saying it was extremely compelling 過癮. Later, well, we all love face, I wanted to make it more beautiful. So I gave it some thought. In Beijing, to me this dress expressed an attitude 狀態 of neither fish nor fowl 不伦不类. I didn’t know what kind of position my music had, in other words, how everyone would receive this kind of music. Moreover, at the time many concepts were vague 模糊 and confusing to me, for in-



Illustration 3.10: Promotional picture of Second Hand Rose, with Liang Long as Shanghai lady.

⁸⁰ The song was originally written for a girl that passed the rehearsal room (conversation, Liang Long).

⁸¹ On the sublime, see Žižek 1989:202, 203, quoting Lacan’s definition: “an object raised to the level of the (impossible-real) Thing.”

stance good and bad, and heroes and villains. People were less and less willing to define these things, therefore I appeared in this (gender) neutral 中性 identity. So, [cross-]dressing was [a way of] representing myself. Later someone suggested that I could dress as a kind of Shanghai dancer. During the daytime she's eternally dispirited, only at night, thickly made-up, she experiences her existence.⁸²

Compared to Leslie Cheung's RED, Liang Long's drag is far from the materialization of beauty that offers him/herself as an object of desire. As parody, it simultaneously mocks the need for such romantic fantasies (aligning itself safely with homophobia) and re-enacts them (opening the possibility of sexual transgression). Humor, parody and ambivalence enable Second Hand Rose to address risqué desires, which is one of their main attractions.

§6 Over the Moon

From SIMPLE TRUTH and GOOD FLOWER RED to Jay Chou's debut single LOVELY LADY 可爱女人 (2000) and Cui Jian's FLOWERHOUSE GIRL 花房姑娘 (1999), many men have sung about maddeningly unattainable beauties. Baranovitch writes:

[In FLOWERHOUSE GIRL Cui Jian] constructs a female image that is more powerful than himself ... The female other is a static creature who uses her sexuality to domesticate the dynamic male self [which] becomes a captive who loses his individuality and freedom.⁸³

This dangerous femininity ties in with both the fit of infatuation *wen*-men fall prey to when they encounter beauties such as Oriole Cui, and the misogyny typical of *wu* masculinity, which values brotherhood and coolness. Although this erotic triangle addresses the Lady, it is the bond between men that defines its structure. The plot excludes the object of desire from the male-dominated public domain of "the ideological articulation of justice and righteousness," in Song Geng's words.⁸⁴ The Lady does not even have the choice between acceptance and rejection: she can only passively accept the rejecting role.

Given the dominance of men behind the scenes, female singers are primarily present in their voice and image. Mladen Dolar explains that the voice potentially challenges the Law-of-the-Father because it suggests excess:

The voice beyond words is a senseless play of sensuality, it possesses a dangerous attractive force, although in itself it is empty and frivolous. The dichotomy of voice and *logos* is already in place.⁸⁵

⁸² New Vision 2006:16'16–17'24.

⁸³ Baranovitch 2003:124.

⁸⁴ Song 2004: 174.

⁸⁵ Dolar 2006:43.

The excess of *jouissance* in (sung) music can only be tolerated when it simultaneously subjects itself to the symbolic order, often explicitly through lyrical content. The mandapop of Zhou Xuan and Teresa Teng is full of *yin-jouissance* – singing, directing desire – while being obedient to the *yang* order of *logos*. The thinness of the dividing line between the positive qualification *wenxin* 溫馨, ‘warm and fragrant,’ and the negative *momo zhi yin* 靡靡之音, ‘sounds of decadence,’ was evidenced by a short period of censorship.⁸⁶ In this fragile balance, the moon is an accepted stand-in for female sexuality. As such it provides a convenient vantage point for the present analysis of traditional mandapop love songs.

The Moon For My Heart

Su Zheng writes in “Female Heroes and Moonish Lovers”:

[In art songs of the 1920s New Culture movement] often women’s existence can only be understood metaphorically through other objects such as the moon, water, flowers, or clouds. The moon, which in Chinese culture represents the feminine, soft, romantic, and desirable but hard to reach, was clearly the most favoured metaphor to portray female lovers.⁸⁷

THE MOON FOR MY HEART is Teresa Teng’s most famous song:⁸⁸

你問 我愛 你有 多深	You ask me how deeply I love you,
我愛 你有 幾分?	how much I love you?
我的情 也真 我的愛 也真	My feelings are true, and so is my love.
月亮代 表我 的 心。	The moon for my heart.
你問 我愛 你有 多深	You ask me how deeply I love you,
我愛 你有 幾分?	how much I love you?
我的情 不移 我的愛 不變	My feelings won’t waver, my love won’t change.
月亮代 表我 的 心。	The moon for my heart.
輕 輕 的 一 個 吻,	Lightly a kiss
已經打 動我 的 心。	already resonates in my heart.

⁸⁶ Li 1993, Wu 1982 and the prize-winning newspaper article Anonymous 1982. See also Steen 2000, and Jones 2001: 114-117 for an explanation of ‘decadent sound’ (indebted to Mittler’s *Dangerous Tunes*, which goes strangely unmentioned) and its uses in the condemnation of 1930s Shanghai pops: “Nie Er’s revolt against his teacher [Li Jinhui] represents just such a deployment of a signficatory scheme in which the feminine is likened to frivolity, decadence, and degradation, and the masculine to probity, righteous struggle, and the nation.”

⁸⁷ Zheng 1996:108. Shi (2006) argues that Chinese traditional music, folk and pop should be seen as feminine (as opposed to Western masculinity).

⁸⁸ The original was composed by Weng Ching-Hsi, with lyrics by Sun Yizhen, and recorded by Chen Fenlan in 1972. However, only with Liu Guanlin’s version did it become a hit. Teresa Teng recorded it in 1977. See also Yeh (2005) for a scholarly account of the unifying power of this song for Chinese all over the world. Cf. Baranovitch 2003:10-11 for a description.

深 深 的 一 段 情,	A deep, deep romance,
教 我 思 念 到 如 今。	it's in my mind to this day.
你 問 我 愛 你 有 多 深	You ask me how deeply I love you,
我 愛 你 有 幾 分?	how much I love you?
你 去 想 一 想 你 去 看 一 看	Just think it over and look around...
月 亮 代 表 我 的 心。	The moon for my heart.

The central question of this song is the obvious one: what does Teng mean by singing “the moon for my heart,” literally: “the moon represents my heart”? The calm, regular rhythm and the soft delivery give the song the air of a lullaby, presenting a promise of enduring (sexual) commitment, backed by the moon as a celestial certainty. But the moon is also enigmatic; its waxing and waning are a potential source of anxiety. The voiceless lover doesn’t get a straight answer to his repeated question, and is teased by the suggestion into finding his own answers or abandoning his demand for clarity altogether. Perhaps he enters the mirage of a tryst, or perhaps the moon signifies a third distant point on which the lovers can focus, diminishing differences and the need for definite answers. Su Zheng writes:

As a subject of desire, women in these songs, however, are formless and illusory, transcending their own embodied existence and sexuality. Not only has women’s sexual identity been transformed into asexual cosmic objects, but in these romantic love songs, even their gender identity is often treated as indeterminate or ambiguous.⁸⁹

THE MOON FOR MY HEART primarily conveys a romantic feeling (‘that which takes place under the moon’) without clear markers of gender. True, the moon suggests *yin*, but that has not stopped men from recording their versions of the song. Earlier I mentioned Leslie Cheung’s tender rendition. The version the male singer Chyi Chin recorded on *Mystery of a Century Love Songs* 世紀情歌之迷 (1999) stands out for its fragility. The pathos of piano and Chyi Chin’s voice on the verge of breaking erupts, halfway through the song, into a vortex of violins, electric guitar, bass and drums.

David Tao reinterprets THE MOON FOR MY HEART as a chorus in the R&B song MOON OVER YOUR HEART 月亮代表誰的心 (2002).⁹⁰ The first verse ends with “a crescent moon watches us going mad with love 愛的痴狂, no need to talk about promises,” after which the chorus doesn’t speak of unchanging love, but of love’s truthfulness to the moment. Moreover, in the final chorus Tao turns the tables, singing “I ask you how much you love me” and “the moon for whose heart.” In contrast to THE MOON FOR MY HEART, MOON OVER

⁸⁹Zheng 1996:108. See also Daly 2005:135 on ‘die dritten Sache’ and Žižek 2006:355-356 on the traumatic nature of direct love.

⁹⁰ Cf. Moskowitz 2010:93-95.

YOUR HEART posits that actual and physical relations are waxing and waning like the moon, while memories are for eternity.

The re-use of THE MOON FOR MY HEART by these and many other male and female artists shows the versatility of this and many other mandapop and cantopop songs, also in terms of gender. This gender versatility suggests a focus on romantic love beyond any actualization, as an object of desire in itself.⁹¹

Faye Wong did not include a version of THE MOON FOR MY HEART on *Decadent Sounds*, her Teresa Teng cover album.⁹² However, THAT MOMENT'S MOON 当时的月亮 on *Only Love Strangers* (1999) quotes the song:

回頭

Turn around and

看 當時的月亮 曾經代表誰的心 結果都一樣

See that moment's moon. It once stood for whose heart? The result is all the same.

看 當時的月亮 一夜之間化做今天的 陽光

See that moment's moon. In a night it consumed today's sunshine.

誰能告訴我哪一種 信仰能夠讓 人 念念不忘

Who can tell me what religion can make one remember and never forget?

當時如果沒有甚麼 當時如果擁有甚麼 又會怎樣

At that moment if there'd been nothing, at that moment if there'd been something: then what?

Anachronistically, we could read THAT MOMENT'S MOON as a reaction to David Tao's MOON OVER YOUR HEART. The protagonist in Wong's song accepts the transient nature of the romance and ends up eulogizing the eternally sweet memory over any results in reality. On first hearing, the song fits the mandapop tradition of female obedience to the male gaze. However, there is a subversive potential in the indifference of the protagonist. The romantic emotion is enough for her, she doesn't need lovers, nor should they expect to constitute a strong presence in her idealized memories. The last words of the song, rendered as *then what*, can be interpreted as stressing curiosity: "What would it be like?" and cynically, as meaning "What would it matter?" In the next pages I will investigate this ambiguity and consider how Faye Wong's sound-image-text hovers between obedient fatalism on the one hand and mild feminism on the other, through autonomy, childishness and duality.

The More Beautiful, the More I Cannot Touch

Anthony Fung and Michael Curtin comment on Faye Wong's debut hit EASILY HURT WOMAN (1991):

⁹¹ Erni 2004:14-15. For a list of renditions, see Jia 2006.

⁹² She did sing it live, and the album contains other moon imagery, such as SO LET US FOR A LONG TIME... 但願人長久, mentioned in Chapter 1.

It is the woman's inability to take positive action in a relationship that is naturalized as a fundamental quality of feminine romance in Chinese heterosexual relationships. ... Faye's success furthermore resonated with stereotypes of the ideal Hong Kong woman that circulated widely in other media – outwardly career-orientated while inwardly still serving the family.⁹³

EASILY HURT WOMAN and similar songs couple lyrics expressing dramatic fatalism to the sound of the traditional *gangtai* ballad, which is structured around the controlled eruption of emotional crises (often through the use of strings) and a return to normalcy in a coda at the end of the song. Many of the songs are in a three-quarter beat.⁹⁴ Prime examples are I AM WILLING (1994APR) and CHESS PIECE 棋子 (1994NOV). In the latter, Faye Wong calls herself a pawn in the hands of her lover/master: “I wanted to escape the domain under your control, but walked into the battleground you prepared” and “None of my moves is caused by myself.” A less explicit example is UNDERCURRENT (1997FEB):

就算
even if
就算
even if
讓這
let this
近你的
close to your
害怕
afraid
歷
his-
其實
really
仍
still
然後
and then

天空再深 看不出 裂痕 眉頭 仍聚滿密雲
heaven'd be deeper I couldn't see the fault line brows still gathering denser clouds
一屋暗燈 照不穿 我身 仍可 反映 你心
a layer of dim light's unable to shine through my body it still can reflect your mind
口煙跳昇 我身軀 下沉 曾多麼想多麼想貼 近你的
puff of smoke rise up and my body sink there was a time I wanted so much so much to be close to your
心和眼口 和耳亦沒緣份我都捉 不 緊 害怕
heart and eye mouth and ear that too wasn't meant to be I can't even hold on tight afraid
悲劇重演 我的命中命中越美麗 的東西我越不可碰 歷
tragedy will reenact it's my fate my fate that the more beautiful something is the more I cannot touch his-
史在重演 這麼煩囂城中沒理由相戀可以 沒有暗湧 其實
tory reenacts in such nauseating cities there's no reason romantic encounters can avoid undercurrents really
我再去愛 惜你又有何用難道這次我抱緊你未必落空 仍
what use would it be if I'd go cherishing again how could my embracing you this time possibly not be loss and void still
靜候著你 說我別錯用神 甚麼我都有 預感 然後
waiting silently you tell me I shouldn't misuse the divine that over everything I have forebodings and then
睜不開兩眼看命運光臨然後天空湧起密雲
cannot open my eyes to face destiny's arrival and then again and again heaven wells of dense clouds

UNDERCURRENT fits the mandapop ballad described in the previous chapter. Wong sings many syllables to each chord, and the melody only gradually meanders to a high-pitched

⁹³ Fung 2002:269-270.

⁹⁴ Su Zheng notices a similar phenomenon in New Culture art songs (Zheng 1996:108, 114).

climax in the penultimate sentence (where the ‘you’ finally speaks, albeit indirectly), only to revert quickly to lower registers and its reminiscing. The song’s cyclic feel is supported by the fast-paced, repetitive piano pattern. *UNDERCURRENT* is almost gender neutral; Anthony Wong recorded a cover version using exactly the same lyrics. He did change the music: prominent drums, distorted guitars, a faster tempo, and a four-beat give the song a *yang* feel, changing *UNDERCURRENT*’s melancholic fatalism into pronounced disbelief.

The fatalism of *UNDERCURRENT* is consistent with media reports of Wong’s love life, and especially her taste for macho boyfriends. Faye Wong married rocker Dou Wei (relationship since 1993, marriage 1996), gave birth to a daughter (1996), was divorced (1999), had a relationship with ‘bad boy’ Nicholas Tse who was 11 years younger (2000–2003), broke up, and remarried with the savvy actor Li Yapeng (relationship since 2003, marriage 2005), after which she retreated from the music business and had a second child (2006). Wong’s first two partners proved their lack of credibility by systematic adultery (Dou Wei, “too wild”) or by neglect and adultery (Nicolas Tse, “too young”).⁹⁵ In quasi-legal language, Faye Wong glosses over the adultery of her then-husband Dou Wei:

Everyone makes mistakes. If extra-marital love 情 should occur, I would first want to know the circumstances under which the other side commits mistakes. If it’s only play, there is no intention of abandoning the family and it’s only a temporary misstep, I will take these circumstances into account 酌情 and practice leniency. If he’s in love with the other, I won’t repent, I’ll stop struggling and won’t try to force what cannot be.⁹⁶

Faye Wong’s relationships with macho *wu*-men, her patience with their adultery, the shampoo commercials with long wavy hair she recorded in 2000 and her many ballads constitute a *yin*-passive strand of dramatic fatalism in her gender identity.⁹⁷

Know Yourself

Whenever asked about her views on love 感情 she would reply without hesitation: “love is basically without intellect 不理智.” This expression conveys her attitude towards love and simultaneously reveals how well she knows herself. But sometimes she seems childish and unworldly 不諳世事.⁹⁸

The section “There’s a Kind of Love Called Faye Wong” in *Biography in Pictures of Faye Wong* 王菲畫傳, from which this quote is taken, starts with Wong’s manager Katie

⁹⁵ Huang 2005:122-129. By 1996 it seemed Dou Wei had never discontinued his relationship with Gao Yuan, who apparently lived with him whenever Faye Wong was not in Beijing. In 2002 Nicolas Tse was involved in a car accident after singing karaoke and drinking with the young female star Cecilia Cheung (Huang 2005:168-173). However, only after repeated incidents did their relationship peter out.

⁹⁶ Huang 2005:117-118.

⁹⁷ A VCD with a making-of of a Head & Shoulders commercial was included in *Fable* (2000).

⁹⁸ Huang 2005:203.

Chan saying that Faye Wong's love is "of the sort of living and dying for him," tying in with an earlier comparison of Faye Wong to a "moth attracted to a flame."⁹⁹ Katie Chan, among other colleagues and friends, publicly disapproved of Faye Wong's romances (perhaps in general) and at some point apparently even told her she could not see Nicholas Tse.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, even Faye Wong's first husband Dou Wei seemed to have advised against it: "In fact, I don't have a good character, you should think twice before marrying me."¹⁰¹

But in matters of love, the public story is that Wong has a will of her own. Fung and Curtis interpret Faye Wong's love life as successful emancipation from the marketing logic of the Chinese music industry. She married twice, despite unwritten rules that celebrities should remain single.¹⁰² Hong Kong megastar Andy Lau, for instance, only admitted to his relationship with Carol Chu in 2009, after keeping it secret for 24 years!

Rather than simply moving to a vantage point of feminism, I want to connect Wong's unyielding attitude in matters of love to the coolness I discussed above, and especially to her autonomy and self-absorbedness. Director Susie Au says:

In the final analysis clips are about the projection of a self, the self of the star. It's about exploring her fantasy, or my fantasy about her. After the first clips, I thought Faye Wong didn't need additional characters or props, she can carry a clip on her own. That started with *KNOW YOURSELF AND EACH OTHER* 知己知彼 [1994JUN] ... For the clip of *FACE* 臉 [2000], ... I wanted to distinguish between an opera Faye, based on her mother, and a rock Faye. The whole clip was about a play of identities, so I thought the audience should wear masks of Faye. However, it's important that there are people behind those masks: it should not be too narcissistic.¹⁰³

Faye Wong's self-absorbedness is also evident from the fact that she has no dancers on stage and sings all of the backing vocals on her studio recording. Although her music leans on coolness, these elements of self-absorbedness translate this notion to Wong's specific stardom. Whereas coolness also has homosocial connotations of showing off in front of the guys or girls, Faye Wong's performances are worlds of their own that, despite their obvious theatrical and commercial frames, seem to have little need to please audiences.

⁹⁹ Huang 2005:202, reference to the lyrics of the song *RUSH FOR THE FIRE* 撲火 (Huang 2005:156, 158).

¹⁰⁰ Huang 2005:107, 152, 146.

¹⁰¹ Huang 2005:107.

¹⁰² Fung 2002:279.

¹⁰³ Conversation, Susie Au, July 2007.

Androgyny

Chou Ch'ien-i pushes this point further by arguing that Faye Wong's world is divorced from outside reality to the extent that common-sensical concepts such as gender distinction no longer apply:

[The liner notes to *Mystery* 迷 (1994APR)] portray Faye Wong as an exceptional, mystical, uncontrollable and enigmatic woman. This enigma originates on the one hand from her break away from habitual interpretative frameworks of narratorship, and on the other hand through qualifications such as 'multilayered' and 'natural sense of propriety' that construct a different, unique logic that is Faye Wong's own—even though we don't know what that is. [The liner notes] continue describing her songs, combining both *yang*-style self-reliance [through terms such as] 'obstinacy,' 'calmness' and 'decisiveness' and *yin*-style tenderness [through terms such as] 'softness', 'warmth' and 'saintly aureole.' This adds up to Faye Wong's both *yin* and *yang* 陰陽同體 (androgynous) [English in original] or (gender) neutral features. ...

In a number of pictures she wears skirts. Faye Wong's expression and posture show two characteristics. In the first place she never looks into the camera: either she bows her head slightly, staring at something in front of her; or she averts her face completely and shows the viewer only her hair. Secondly, Faye Wong doesn't smile in any of these pictures. She seems to be observing, feeling or pondering over something, or maybe she's just absent-minded. To a certain extent these two characteristics craft an image of Faye Wong as a lonesome cool lady who is divorced from, disregarding of and even antagonistic to the outside world of society. Through a detached and self-enclosed posture, this kind of image subverts the patriarchal visual tradition that pleases the male gaze.¹⁰⁴

Besides liner notes, posture and dress, Chou also refers to Faye Wong's unfeminine short hairstyle. Chou shows that Wong suggests an inner world that is autonomous and enigmatic, eternally outside of the grasp of the male-dominated world of responsibility and work. The gender neutrality of the 'you' that Faye Wong addresses in her love songs and the increasingly abstract and cryptic nature of her lyrics in the course of the 1990s are consistent with this inclination towards androgyny.



Illustration 3.11: Faye Wong on the cover of her 1994 album *Mystery* 迷.

¹⁰⁴ Chou 1998.

Childishness

In contrast to what Anthony Fung argues, I see Wong's androgyny less as a tactic to appeal to both sexes and more as a part of her childlike, autonomous and cool star persona.¹⁰⁵ Wong's youthfulness renders her desirable, and fuels the more or less conscious idolization of *having* Faye Wong. But her youthfulness also suggests the uncomplicatedly sunny days of childhood, offering fans opportunities to imagine *being* Faye Wong.

The commercial and video clip of *EXCELLENCE* contrast a young Faye Wong in school uniform with the established pop star, reminiscent of Michael Jackson's *NEW GENERATION* (1984) and Madonna's *LIKE A PRAYER* (1989) commercials. Unlike the emphasis in those clips, the accent is not on slick choreography: "In typical Faye style, she frolics like a flower child rather than dances," as Fung and Curtin put it.¹⁰⁶ Hence the crux of the juxtaposition is not the American dream that every schoolgirl can gain control over her body, and hence her destiny. Conversely, the clip shows that Faye Wong has not grown up – the playful girl is still inside her. The colorful images of Faye Wong flying and floating relate directly to the bird the young girl releases in the schoolyard.

Faye Wong's love life and motherhood have only thrown her youthfulness into relief. The idealization of Faye Wong's motherhood started with the use of paparazzi pictures of a barely recognizably pregnant Faye Wong on the cover of her EP *Toy* 玩具 (1997FEB). The baby's voice was subsequently used on *CHILD* 童, the last track of *Scenic Tour*, which was composed by Dou Wei, the father. The lyrics by Lam Chik celebrate the joy of loving a baby. Only the title and the widely known context make clear that the baby is a child rather than a lover. The ambiguity between parental and romantic love is even stronger in the title track of *Only Love Strangers* 只愛陌生人 (1999), which features samples of Dou Jingtong's baby talk and lyrics that eulogize love "more naive than a pet." Through these songs, Faye Wong successfully redirected her motherhood from a story of growing up that potentially threatened her popularity toward a tale of rejuvenation.



Ventriloquism

Faye Wong offers the fantasy of an inner world that is autonomous and enigmatic, eternally outside of the grasp of the symbolic order. *ONE PERSON IN TWO ROLES* 一人分饰两角 (1995) suggests a private, true self within or behind the public image:

¹⁰⁵ Fung 2004:53.

¹⁰⁶ Fung 2002:276.

獨自說話 我是一個人
但是對白 照樣分兩份
兩份 是我和我 兩份
就像裡面 有另一個人
做著某段 兩人的戲份
戲夢 在扣著我 人生

Talking on my own I am alone,
but in dialogue I split in two.
Two parts me and me two parts,
as if inside there's another person
playing some act for two people.
Theater dream does me in for life.

別太認真 別太著緊
亂說話怎麼當成真
別太認真 別那樣天真
亂說話怎麼會成真
難道我是神

Don't be too serious don't be too impatient.
Random prattle, how could it be taken for real?
Don't be too serious don't be so innocent.
Random prattle, how could it be taken for real?
I could hardly be a god.

Karen Coats has described a similar construction in her analysis of Lewis Carroll's *Alice through the Looking Glass*.¹⁰⁷ Since the symbolic order is suspended in Wonderland, in that magical place notions such as gender and age lose the significance they had in the social and cultural systems of language and law. Simultaneously, Carroll's fantastic projection is fully within the symbolic order and entirely sustained by his desire. Carroll sublimates his lack onto Alice as an object of desire and pits his efforts against the enjoyment of the big Other, i.e. the symbolic order.

Alice wants to enter the symbolic order but Lewis Carroll's desire prevents her from growing up. Faye Wong, by contrast, combines aspects of both Alice and Carroll. Her sound-image-text suggests that Faye Wong carries an unspoiled "Ah Faye" inside her who doesn't need or want to grow up. Faye Wong would like to always be Ah Faye, but is forced by the outside world (the media) to act as a responsible grown-up on numerous occasions, buffering the spontaneous, child inside her from corruption.

"one can't help growing older."

"*One* can't, perhaps," said Humpty Dumpty, "but *two* can."¹⁰⁸

The desire of the audience, and of fans in particular, sustains this projection, and blinds them to Wong's role as Lewis Carroll, as consciously planning and manipulating her media image, to great commercial success.

Although the whole fantastic construction is built around the desire fans feel towards Faye Wong, it is going too far to say that fans by definition fantasize about sleeping with their idols and that female fans of Wong (or of Mei Lanfang or Leslie Cheung) have lesbian tendencies, as the latter half of Chou Ch'ien-i's article suggests. Firstly because next to idolization, identification (being Faye Wong) is also crucial. Additionally, the idol is structurally unreachable. Similar to the Lady in the canso, the pop diva can be

¹⁰⁷ Coats 2004:86.

¹⁰⁸ Coats 2004:88, citing Lewis Carroll (162).

intensely desired while actualization is strictly out of the question, and will be refused.¹⁰⁹ In the end, the credibility of the construction of a public Faye Wong versus an eternally pure and young Ah Faye depends also on the willingness of fans to go along with the fantasy, to “not be too serious.” In Susie Au’s words, “It’s about exploring her fantasy, or my fantasy about her.”¹¹⁰

Against the Politics of Romance

Faye Wong’s autonomy, androgyny and duality can be experienced as liberating. In a number of songs, Wong more directly challenges the centrality of *yang* and its stress on masculinity and rationality, albeit in a playful and non-confrontational way.

In the clip *HEADING FOR TUMI* (1999, d. Susie Au), Faye Wong eliminates black men with toy guns and a huge snowball, opposing the symbolic order they represent with a hedonistic and unspoiled *jouissance*. *THAT YOU LIKE ME MATTERS LESS THAN THAT I LIKE YOU* 你喜歡不如我喜歡 (2000) discredits causality in romantic relationships, celebrating love’s illogical and spontaneous nature:

愛你是我的習慣	It’s my habit to love you.
不管你未來怎麼辦	No matter what you do in the future,
不能償還 不用交換	no paying back, no need for exchange.
你喜歡不如我喜歡	That you like me matters less than that I like you.

那麼簡單 就把這情歌亂彈	As simple as that, randomly playing this love song,
你來聽 我來唱	you’ll listen and I’ll sing.

In this song, Wong sings of men as toys and as objects in galleries and museums (open to the public), nice but ephemeral to the autonomous Faye Wong. Wong is known for commenting: “men are flirts 花心, so why not look for a handsome one.”¹¹¹ *DEPRESSING* 悶 (1997) contains her lyrics that come closest to feminism:

誰說愛上一個不回家的人	Who said loving someone who doesn’t come home
唯一結局就是無止境的等	can only result in endless waiting?
是不是 不管愛上什麼人	Will you demand whoever you love
也要天長地久求一個安穩	to reassure you until the end of time?
噢噢難道真沒有別的劇本	O... O... Is there really no other script?
怪不得能動不動就說到永恆	No wonder that at the least little thing
	eternity is dragged in.

誰說愛人就該愛他的靈魂	Who said loving someone means loving his soul
否則聽起來讓人覺得不誠懇	or others will think you don’t really mean it?

¹⁰⁹ See in this respect also Oriole Cui’s fate in the Tang Dynasty marvelous tale.

¹¹⁰ Conversation, Susie Au, July 2007.

¹¹¹ Huang 2005:164.

是不是 不管愛上什麼人
也要天長地久求一個安穩
噢 噢 我真想有那麼的單純
不可能難道真沒有別的可能
這怎麼成

Will you demand whoever you love
to reassure you until the end of time?
O... O... I'd really like to be that simple.
Impossible, is there really no other option?
How can this be?

我不要安穩 我不要犧牲
別希望我會愛到滿身傷痕
我不怕沉淪一切隨興能不能

I don't want reassuring I don't want sacrifice.
Don't want to love you till I'm covered with scar.
I'm not afraid of petering out,
couldn't we just go with the flow?

Whereas WHEN WILL THE GENTLEMAN RETURN 君何日再来, sung by both Zhou Xuan and Teresa Teng, and LOVING SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T COME HOME 愛上一個不回家的人 (1990) by Sandy Lam, repeat the passive, waiting role of Chinese women, Faye Wong empowers Chinese women by suggesting that they have a choice. But she goes no further. She has not articulated a truly feminist agenda. Rather than joining the battle of the sexes, Wong opts for spontaneous insight into the futility of “attributes” that cloud pure love. In her discussion of the album *To Love* 將愛 (2003), she presents love as enigmatic, while referring to her Buddhism:

Faye Wong: “I already said everyone has a different understanding [of love]. If you feel that [TO LOVE] is gloomy, that reveals your view of things often contains a pessimistic standpoint. As for the comparison of love and war in this song, what I express is not emotional experience 感受 but emotional depth 感慨. Love originally isn't war, but my love will beget a battlefield. When outsiders observe my love, they will attribute lots of things to it, such as fame, [marketing] strategies, etc. But in fact love is just love, it's a very simple thing. I'm not saying love is war, but due to the outside environment as well as what gets attributed to it, it may seem like a battlefield.”

Host: “Many people will offer entirely different explanations after hearing your songs.”

Faye Wong: “So even if I explain it myself, others will still persist in their own opinions. In fact I wrote this line “Carry love through to the end” 將愛進行到底 because past experience made me feel that many people have a dark, very unhappy perception of certain things. Love is love. There are no strings attached. But many people don't see it that way. Those views don't get to me, they will rather get at themselves. In fact, if we could have less superficial opinions and more love in our hearts, I think the world would be much more beautiful. The kind of love I speak about, is not only romance, it also contains another love.”¹¹²

¹¹² Zeng 2003a.

§7 Fox Fatale

When Marc Moskowitz argues that “women have become the cultural ideal for what the majority of Chinese hope to be,” he refers to the performances of *yin* in contemporary mainstream pop rather than the more *yang*-oriented Iron Girls 鐵姑娘 of PRC mass music, rock chicks or even alternative voices within mandapop.¹¹³ Do these assertive femininities challenge conservative notions of passive, moonish gender?

Baranovitch describes the Iron Girls as part of a moment of gender erasure:

In the process of gaining their social equality, in the overwhelmingly militant and masculine period of the Cultural Revolution, model women were supposed to aspire to be like men both physically and mentally. This concept of womanhood revealed itself, among other ways, in the much-celebrated officially sponsored image of the Iron Girls ... which emerged right before the Cultural Revolution and depicted women doing traditionally male work, such as repairing electricity lines and drilling for oil.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, interviewees in Yan Ting Yuen’s documentary *Yang Ban Xi: The 8 Model Works* (2005) describe how their sexual desire was first aroused by one of the most central works of the Cultural Revolution, the ballet *The Red Detachment of Women* 紅色娘子軍.¹¹⁵ This shows that although the Model Operas explicitly aimed at symbolic identification with larger-than-life *yang*-heroes fighting grotesque villains, idolization also played an important role, with beautiful heroes and heroines personifying utopia.

The fact that women perform center stage is no guarantee of emancipation. With both Mei Lanfang and Zhou Xuan, men held power behind the scenes. Nevertheless, although in Model Opera actors could also be replaced with relative ease – heroes were beautified by lighting, camera angles and upbeat music – artistic control was firmly in the hands of a woman, namely Jiang Qing. A more thorough evaluation of the emancipatory thrust of the Iron Girls and the Model Operas than I provide here would also address Jiang’s uncomfortable position as Mao Zedong’s wife and as scapegoat for the Cultural Revolution.

Despite the star system’s stress on individuality, replaceability has been part and parcel of mandapop too – for instance in Li Jinhui’s Bright Moon troupe and, more recently (around 2005), the Twelve Girls Band, who play poppy, upbeat instrumental renditions of Chinese and European classics, as well as new compositions on traditional Chinese instruments. Wang Xiaojing, one-time manager of Cui Jian, is behind the success. He explains:

¹¹³ Moskowitz 2010:87, cf 29.

¹¹⁴ Baranovitch 2003:108-109.

¹¹⁵ Yan 2005.

The Twelve Girls Band is immensely popular in China and abroad. [So] I told them, you have to see clearly what lies ahead and take a firm hold of your position. I think they truly understand and will cherish their jobs. This format of ours is quite convenient: every one [of the fourteen performers] is replaceable.¹¹⁶

This already suggests that the PRC's liberalization and free-market economy have not necessarily led to a comprehensive improvement in women's sociopolitical and cultural state and role, as compared to the Revolutionary Era. On the contrary, Baranovitch argues that the sound-image-text of the domesticated, gentle, sweet, restrained women that dominated the 1990s has offered very limited liberating possibilities for women, and is essentially male-dominated.¹¹⁷ Moskowitz similarly concludes:

Although *wenrou*, *lamei* [spicy/hot girl] and *ke'ai* [cute, *kawaii*] (or some combination of the three) are the three most prevalent forms of femininity portrayed in the Gang-Tai pop industry, three Hong Kong-based performers in particular have added a new rebellious component to the mix: Karen Mok, Anita Mui and Faye Wong. ... Far from going for shock value or challenging established norms, in many ways mandapop lyrics are more conservative than the real world ... Mandapop songs are strongly gender coded by both lyrics and performances, yet because audiences are fully aware that men write many of the songs that women sing, the songs are also a testament to a faded line between women and men.¹¹⁸

I have already shown that Mei Lanfang, Zhou Xuan, Teresa Teng, Leslie Cheung, Anthony Wong and Faye Wong offer audiences opportunities for articulating progressive genders.¹¹⁹ They do so, not through confrontation, but through the ambiguity that arises from the interplay of textual metaphors, gender bending, and the interaction between film roles and the star persona. Sammi Cheng and Anita Mui further show that ambiguity is the Chinese pop star's main strategy in addressing gender issues.

Just like her main rival Faye Wong, Sammi Cheng developed away from the passive femininity of her first hits. Cheng's *TEN COMMANDMENTS* 十誡 (1994) was banned from radio and television in Hong Kong because of 'pornophonic' background croons. To a groovy beat, *TODAY YOU ARE SO GOOD, MAN* 男仕今天你很好 (1995) ironically celebrates the greatness of men, because "without you, women would have nothing to fret about." Incidentally, the song also qualifies Moskowitz' claim that humor in pop music is restricted to the domain of male songs.¹²⁰ Cheng performed *BEWARE OF WOMEN* 小心女人 (1996) in a tuxedo at concerts in 1996 and 2000, with male dancers kowtowing to her. However, from 1997 Cheng's feminism became less confrontational, moving towards an-

¹¹⁶ Zhang 2004:17.

¹¹⁷ Paraphrasing Baranovitch 2003:113.

¹¹⁸ Moskowitz 2010:85-6.

¹¹⁹ On Anthony Wong, see De Kloet 2010:131-138.

¹²⁰ Moskowitz 2010:97-99. S.H.E. and Faye Wong have also used humor, albeit sporadically.

drogyny and traditional ideals of female beauty (slimness), which Anthony Fung explains through the restrictions of the pop industry.¹²¹ For instance, in 2001 she published an album with romantic ballads titled *Wenrou* 溫柔 ‘gentle.’

Sammi Cheng was inspired by Anita Mui, whose *BAD GIRL* 壞女孩 (1986) was controversial in the 1980s. It was banned in the PRC for describing, to an arousing dance rhythm, how a seducer “makes an innocent girl want to become bad” (as Lawrence Witzleben puts it).¹²² Cheng and Mui worked together to record the ballad *SINGLE WOMEN* 單身女人 (Mui 2002), in which they discuss their problems in romance and work, referring to their star personas, over dinner. As this ballad shows, to Mui, too, assertive femininity is one of many faces, some of which are conservative and passive. Again, this doesn’t mean that these artists haven’t contributed in this realm, but that celebrating them as straightforward symbols of female emancipation is too easy.

Moskowitz observes that, in contrast to the West, in Chinese pop the image of the vixen is almost non-existent.¹²³ Written around 1679 and still a source of inspiration for opera, cinema and TV drama, Pu Songling’s *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* 聊齋誌異 provides a locus classicus for the siren-like fox-spirit 狐狸精. However, aside from Zhou Xuan’s contemporary Bai Guang, few have cultivated this Lady and her excessive *yin* energies.¹²⁴

Additionally, all recent examples of androgyny and gender transgression originate from Hong Kong. Taiwan seems most traditional, even if one considers the singer-songwriters discussed in the previous chapter. In the PRC, folk and rock music offer a stage for feminism. The new voices of women in the 1990s that Baranovitch describes use folk tunes to address personal and daily concerns.¹²⁵ De Kloet shows how female rock musicians from the 1990s to early 2000s

operate as signifiers of an assumed gender equality (denial), of cultural transgression (dramatisation), of political change (politicisation) and of a global modernity (cosmopolitisation). Whatever tactic they choose to negotiate the male bias of rock, female musicians operate in a cultural field considered quintessentially masculine, as well as carry [sic] the burden of representing a China in transition; they all too often serve as a proxy for something else, and are hence deprived of their individuality.¹²⁶

Kang Mao’s traumatic growling with the punk rock outfit Subs (since 2003), Atom’s energetic role as drummer of Hedgehog (since 2005) and Helen Feng’s sultry alternative

¹²¹ Fung 2009; 2004:44-61.

¹²² Witzleben 1999:247.

¹²³ Moskowitz 2010:72.

¹²⁴ Ho 1993:39, 61. On how Communist heroines perform *yang*-roles, see Farquhar 2006:116. On gender erasure, cf. Zheng 1996:104.

¹²⁵ Baranovitch 2003:161-189.

¹²⁶ De Kloet 2010:119.

rock with Ziyi (since 2004) and Pet Conspiracy (since 2007) are just a few examples of the increasing presence of female musicians in the Beijing band scene.

§8 Concluding Remarks

Music doesn't satisfy desire, but teaches you how to desire. My analysis of Chinese love songs in a psychoanalytic framework inspired by Žižek's reading of Lacan, supplemented with Chinese concepts such as *yin* and *yang*, *wen* and *wu*, validates this modification of Žižek's words. Pop stars invite audiences to identify with them, for instance to relive a painful break-up together, and to gain strength from that identification. This is true for Xiao He's *SIMPLE TRUTH* but also for Winnie Hsin's ballad *REALIZATION* 領悟 (1994). Moskowitz argues that

one can almost hear her lover's male voice as she paraphrases his reasons for leaving her. Thus, we have a man [Jonathan Lee] writing a song to be performed by a woman, criticizing a man by using his stereotypically male language.

This was the song that brought Winnie Hsin overnight success. Tellingly, it is widely thought that the song's popularity is in part due to the fact that it related to her real-life divorce. The fact that she "naturally" cries when she performs this piece also conveys this sense of authenticity to the audience. The statement that she only came to fully understand [and "realize"] herself in her unsuccessful struggle to communicate with a male romantic partner is also common in Chinese-language pop music.¹²⁷

Simultaneously, stars offer themselves as objects of desire and idolization. Before Faye Wong, they did so by presenting themselves as beautiful, either by suggesting availability as girls and boys next door and as caring, understanding and *wenrou* friends, or by presenting an aura of glamor and success. Leslie Cheung performed both of these roles in *Across 1997*, first singing and dancing as a glamorous diva and later talking as a friend who shares an open secret with the audience. Since 1994, Faye Wong has introduced a coolness that places fans and their star in an intimate but unspeakable circle, projecting all unwanted news onto the media, who personify the worldly tainting of love and ideals.

These constructs shape gender roles and direct desire. They create fantasies that offer *jouissance* without exposing subjects to its traumatically real power, that enable people to listen to the voice of others without drowning in their alterity. The seemingly misplaced, subterranean sounds of the instrumental bridge of Faye Wong's *ROMANCE LIFE* 感情生活 (1998) are quickly pushed to the back again by the rumbling groove, by the buzz of life.

¹²⁷ Moskowitz 2010:74.