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The anxiety of love: an analysis of recent Chinese popular music

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ABSTRACT

Love between two sexes is a time-honored but commonplace theme in songs that it does not seem to demand scholarly attention. Yet, the manner in which sexual love is expressed in Chinese songs today carries with it the deep stigma of the sea change that has been taking place in recent Chinese culture. The present paper discovers that, as a result of drastic changes in Chinese people's attitude toward sexual relations, there has been a greater anxiety in songs intended for men to sing, as well as those for women, and manifestations of the anxiety of the loss of love are gender-specific. In "male songs," paradoxically, the anxiety has been more voiced and apparently with more pain, which is one of the key indicators of the profound change in sexual attitudes in Chinese society.

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1. Love in Chinese popular music

After almost 30 years of stringent "puritanical" life in Mainland China, popular entertainment music poured into China in the 1980s, and became the mainstream of Chinese music ever since, despite the fact that the Administration has been all along feeling uneasy about its indulgence in "mundane life," which might be a diversion or dilution of the state ideology. Popular songs, mostly on romantic love, could be understood as a faithful reflection of the emotional life of Chinese common people today.

A significant function of music is emotional communication, which manifests itself in a communicative situatedness from which rise the conditions for its significance, thus partly externalized from the semiotic order and conventions of the culture. The theme of love, however, seems to have been constant in music throughout the human history and remains one of its most important topics all the time in all nations.¹ Because of its ubiquity, how people sing about their love, and their anxiety about its loss, is a powerful indicator of the sociocultural conditions in which they live. That is why this theme may demonstrate a profound spiritual imprint of the time, reflecting or embodying ideological shifts and cultural balances.

Although popular music took off in the US around the end of the nineteenth century, serious studies of popular music did not appear until considerably later. Scholarship offered by Marcus (1968), Gillet (1970), among others (Roxen 1969), as well as Frith's

music reviews, appeared as early as the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. Being a cross-media genre, popular songs require a performance and distribution network. Yet, while the industry of pop music is susceptible to study, its lyrics are often taken to be the clearest locus of signification in its cross-media existence. Among the serious scholarly works, Simon Frith's (1978) book *The Sociology of Rock* examines (though not solely) song lyrics to show how popular songs are produced and consumed in society. In 1989, John Fiske, in his groundbreaking interpretation of popular culture, also focused on lyrics. Offering a close-reading of Michael Jackson's song "Thriller," he concludes that the consumers of pop music wage a semiotic guerilla warfare against the culture industry, which, according to Theodor Adorno, was manipulating common people's cultural life. Richard Middleton was among early contributors to the scholarship (1990). Lately, Lars Eckstein's *Reading Song Lyrics* offered a workable methodology to analyze song lyrics (2010). Christopher Ricks' *Dylan's Vision of Sin* concentrates on Dylan's lyrics, treating them as canonized poetical works (2003). As if to show convincingly that the study of song lyrics now stands firmly in the college curriculum, almost 24 professors of English contributed to the collection *The Poetics of American Song Lyrics* (Pence 2012).

Scholars have noticed that, as Western countries were undergoing drastic sociocultural changes in the 1960s–1970s, it was the songs of love that changed first. Carey (1972) suggested that the contemporary popular song had witnessed a shift from romantic love to physical desire, and he commented that it reveals a cultural shift to deeper rooted individualism. With the rise of feminism, there appeared more works, among them Steward and Garratt (1984). In Whiteley (1997), the (self-)image of women in pop music lyrics has been given much attention, and gender became an all-consuming issue in cultural studies approaches to songs. Horner and Swiss (1999) provide a substantial essay on "gender." Kruse (1999) and Machin (2010) were among the analyzers of the change of interactions between sexes in pop lyrics, from the male "having the power," to the scenario where his vulnerability is exposed (Whiteley 2000).

Chinese scholars started to pay attention to love songs partly because of the alarming influx of what the hardline ideologues called the "bourgeois decadent" Hong-Kong–Taiwan songs pouring into Mainland Chinese at the beginning of the 1980s, immediately after the ending of the puritanical social life of the Cultural Revolution (Nan 1981). Yet, solid scholarly work did not appear until much later, after 2000. Jin's book *Flaunted Fad* (Jin 2002) is still part of the lasting ideological controversy about those early songs, but a much calmer tone emerged in Fu's chronicle *Twenty Years of Popular Songs in China* (Fu 2003). Since then, sober scholarly attention has been sustained in a continuous flow of academic works in China.

Brace (1991) was one of the early studies of Chinese popular music, but it, like many others, concentrates more on Chinese underground Rock'n Roll. Nimrod Baranovitch (2003) touches on the issue of gender in Chinese popular music today. So is a collection of interviews and field work reports edited by the ethnologist Rachel Harris and others (2013). Perhaps this is not surprising, since the issue of sex roles had been deceptively straightforward in traditional China, whereas in modern times, however, the situation has been changing so drastically that it could easily baffle outside observers. One point has to be made clear here: Rock'n Roll, for various reasons, has been somewhat detached from the everyday life of Chinese common people, including the young people, as described by Wang Qian (2015, 122). The sample songs examined in the present paper

are taken from the top 500 list on the most popular search engine in China, Baidu.com, which represent the type of music Chinese audience actually listen and sing most.

2. The anxiety of love

For thousands of years in Chinese history, the sorrow stirred up by unrequited love was a topic favored by literati-poets writing song lyrics. Those poets appeared, in those lyrics, to have been emotionally overcome by anxiety and self-pity. Nevertheless, those songs were actually written on behalf of courtesan-singers, who were the personae behind the songs, and whose desperation for love was just what those poets themselves wanted to hear. Only occasionally we are confused over the question of whose anxiety – the poets' or the courtesan-singers' – was actually being expressed in the songs. It was frequently suggested that the poets were often talking metaphorically about their anxiety in love, hinting actually on the frustration in their career.

The anxiety of love presupposes intense pleasure, for its loss means little if it is not once enjoyable in the first place, and anxiety emerges when one's explicit or implicit call for love garners no response. That was why, in traditional Chinese society, love songs hardly touched the topic of marriage, which, in ancient China, was not sustained by love but rather by duty to the family. Love, then, existed only with extramarital encounters, mostly with courtesans when men of letters were away from home on their long journey to the civil examination, to officialdom, or on business. Not much could be expected from those encounters on the road, no matter how intense the love looked at the time, and the love songs, produced by and for those encounters, were actually an emotional performance. Both the poets and singers knew that they were only having a few dreamlike days of romance. That is one reason why there have been so many love songs in the long history of Chinese poetry, but not many about the anxiety of "true love" for life.

Against such a cultural tradition of huge numbers of beautiful love songs (all so languishingly sorrowful) in Chinese history, love songs in China today are on the opposite, reflecting real love that should lead to marriage but could also give rise to real anxiety. The first reason behind such a change is the modern social apparatus of free marriage: whether love could finally lead to it and sustain is now an urgent question. In contemporary China, love as represented in or by marriage cannot be reduced solely to physical urge or psychological impulse but may be better addressed in the context of marriage as a sociocultural institution which demands in modern China a mutual recognition in order to sustain. Only by recognizing the other party as an equal participant could someone enter the courting and matrimonial game. Therefore, love is more a confirmation of the other's qualification for joining the game and due respect is to be paid to this qualification.

What, then, is implied in the anxiety demonstrated in modern love songs? When experiencing love, one feels a serious mental conflict that can lead to a confusion of identities, a clash between what one has been and what one is becoming. Anxiety, then, is the symptom of losing control of one's own identity, a symptom of the chasm between the subject and its desired object, as they fall, more often than not, from possible connection into disastrous separation. Furthermore, anxiety is not only the loss of the object but the helplessness one feels when facing such a separation. The pain thus produced is, one feels, hard to express since it could hardly be understood by others.

3. Anxiety, sex, and song

Songs could usually be divided by their “textual sexes”: male songs, female songs, songs between sexes, transsexual songs, and non-sexual songs (Lu 2013, 73–77). They are identified as such according to three indices: first, there are words in the lyrics identifying the narrator or the addressee’s sex; second, in singing practice, whether humming alone or to order in Karaoke, the lyrics may also be suitable for a specific sex; third, they are often “originally” performed by singers of one sex that personified the addresser. With these three factors in consideration, whether a song is meant for men or for women to sing is rarely undistinguished.

Since the textual sexes of songs are often different from those of the lyricists, composers, narrators, or singers, the question of “whose anxiety is being sung” becomes extremely complicated. For instance, anxiety for the loss of love looms large in the so-called male songs in China today, more so than in “female” songs, and, in recent Chinese songs, “heart-broken men” are now more frequently heard than distressed women. This has never been witnessed in traditional Chinese culture. The paradoxical anxiety of love is a peculiar indication of the complicated underpinnings of sexual and personal identity in Chinese culture in recent years.

The anxiety of love is the result of the anxiety of choice, which results from determined interpretation, wherein a party in sexual relations tries to confirm his/her attitude toward the other. But when the other party does not respond, or appears hesitant, anxiety arises. In traditional society, the arranged marriage deprived people of the freedom to choose partners, but also saved them from the pain of choice. In modern Chinese society, however, the freedom of choice seems boundless, as life no longer looks like an insulated text but a conjoint narrative formed from clusters of seemingly significant episodes. As soon as the process of choice starts, all kinds of covert bargaining and negotiations lead to mounting pressures on the subject, making him/her unable to follow a coherent principle, and her/his “free will” hangs on the brink of an uncontrollable chaos. When the axis of selection is too wide, one’s selection can only be random, and, in the end, chance encounters prevail. The more open the system, the more complicated the meaning is, which leads to the paradox of choice, that is, a closure after opening up. As Soren Kierkegaard (1980, 43) suggested, “Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom.”

In Chinese society today, love is the choice of signification made by two atomized persons. Freed from the constraints of traditional family-clan politics, their bond could disintegrate any time. In fact, love has become one of the most unstable aspects of interpersonal relationships today. It is most susceptible to transformation when one of the two parties suffers from a change of mind. In fact, men are more susceptible to the anxiety since there is in the huge Chinese population today a serious unbalance of sexes (with tens of millions young men doomed to be single) that resulted from 50 years of stringent “One-Child” policy enforced by the government since the mid-1970s².

4. The anxious men in love songs

Whereas repetition in other discourses attenuates the narrative due to the lessening of informativity, repetition in music leads to an enrichment of emotion. The characteristic

symptom of anxiety is repetition of the same thing, a feature most natural in the composition of pop songs.

Male songs are not necessarily composed by men nor female songs by women. They could be called as such because they demonstrate sex-distinctive textual identities, which are not decided by physical sex of the producers of the song but by the text's social sex role. Male or female songs are "meant" for male or female members of the audience to sing along, as those songs demonstrate distinctive male or female social characteristics. For this reason, we could see in songs a wide differentiation in society's expectations toward men and women. In male songs today, it is observable that the greatest anxiety is the singer's fear of losing his connection with the girl.

There are, generally speaking, three types of male reactions to the loss of love. The first type is to launch a counter-attack, a typical male attitude in trying to overcome the obstacle. The song *You love me or him?* (爱我还是他, lyric by Wa Wa娃娃, music by Tao Zhe陶喆)³, for example:

You love me or him? I gave you 100 reasons. How silly I am!

你爱我还是他? 我为你找了一百个理由, 我就是那么傻

You love me or him? If silence is your answer I should know it.

你爱我还是他? 是否沉默代替你的回答, 我应该明白吧

You love me or him? You don't see anything good in me.

你爱我还是他? 你都已看不到我们的好, 我还为谁牵挂

You love me or him? If silence is your answer let's both give up.

你爱我还是他? 是否沉默代替你的回答, 我们都别挣扎

Go and love him!

去爱他吧!

There's neither entreating nor imploring. This is the most stereotypically male attitude. The question, repeated six times in the stanza, leaves no room for hesitation. The addresser does not want to let the third one to press him into anxiety as he is ready to push the addressee to withdraw. The song ends with a resolute imperative "Go and love him!" and, thereby, male anxiety is suppressed. In songs, which prize romantic language, such an intense feeling does not appear frequently. Yet, understandably, this extrovert denial supposedly relieves anxiety more effectively than any other attitude. Since signification always starts with some measure of partiality, songs do not reflect social reality but the psychological dynamism that spurs people to sing. In reality, men capable of this type of action do not have to express anxiety in singing, and those who sing in this way just yearn to be men of the type.

When facing emotional anxiety, another reaction of the addresser is trying to hide his feelings, thus making his song more like a soliloquy. The song *Practice* (练习, lyric by Li Anxiu 李安修 and Wang Yuzong 王裕宗, music by Li Feihui 黎沸挥, and originally sung by Liu Dehua 刘德华)⁴ is an example:

If I could stay one more minute, it could reduce my pain tomorrow,

如果留下多一秒钟，可以减少明天想你的痛

I'd like to leave everything in exchange of having you a little longer.

我会愿意放下所有，交换任何一丝丝可能的占有

After many sweet dreams there's only a little sand in the clock of happiness.

眼睁睁看着一幕幕甜蜜，不会再有

The normal life once I took for granted has become an impossible hope.

原本平凡无奇的拥有，到现在竟像是无助的奢求

I've started to practice, worried about the world without you.

我已开始练习，开始慢慢着急，着急这世界没有你

Although love is between two people, anxiety is suffered mostly by the one who is more emotionally involved. In this song, the addressee stays in the relationship, at least at this moment; but what worries the addresser is that his world would soon be without her, and he has to preempt the traumatization through rehearsing it, since he knows he is not able to endure the pain.

The following song *Happier Than Me* (比我幸福, lyric by Chen Jingnan 陈静楠, music by Li Weisong 李伟崧, originally sung by Chen Xiaodong 陈晓东)⁵ demonstrates the third type of reaction, i.e. aloofness: to sublimate one's anxiety by way of a "noble" self-sacrifice.

My blessing breaks my heart, but what else could I say?

心痛却尽在不言中

Please be happier than me, so I'm not quitting for nothing.

请你一定要比我幸福,才不枉费我狼狈退出,

I'm not saying sorry as love cannot be patched up by apologies.

爱不用抱歉来弥补

At least my withdrawing satisfies your heart's desire,

至少我能成全你的追逐

Remember you must be happier to make my agony worthwhile.

请记得你要比我幸福，才值得我对自己残酷

Facing the addressee who has actually jilted the addresser, the male addresser has no choice but to let her "satisfy your heart's desire." There is no mention of any antagonism to the third party, as if the addresser succumbs willingly in order to preserve his moral superiority in a kind of altruistic retreat. Is this what New Confucianism adheres, "to settle emotion with morality"? (Xu 2007, 55). Or is it a way to prevent more trauma? The line "You must be happier to make my self-torture worthwhile" sounds like a blessing and a challenge at the same time. For anxiety is a kind of helpless release of emotion,

and a song is “an attempt to get rid of anxiety by accelerating it” (Tarasti 2000, 82–83); that is, to express one’s anxiety before it is beyond repair. The desire to monopolize the love is actually more obvious with men, who occupy a dominant position in any “civilized society.” Once such a monopoly is seen to be unachievable, intense emotion arises, which is shown more clearly in “male songs.” “Anxiety as expressed through musical tones is already public anxiety. The paradox of art lies in the fact that its deepest reality is inner, but this reality has to become external” (Tarasti 2000, 81) – that is why anxiety symbioses with art so effectively, and is arguably the dynamic behind art. The eternal theme of art might be love; but its perpetual motivation, unrequited love.

5. Women’s anxiety in love songs

The emotional anxiety in female songs in China is drastically different from that of male songs which is often redolent of the male desire for possession. Anxiety in female songs is more a result of sorrow and self-pity about unrequited love. Once projected onto songs, there will also appear three common attitudes. The first type is to grieve over the misfortune. The song *Soliloquy* (独角戏, originally sung by Xu Ruyun 许茹芸)⁶ runs like this:

Who’s the director of this play, where I am a lone character.

是谁导演这场戏, 在这孤单角色里

I talk to myself, always about my never-ending memories.

对白总是自言自语, 对手都是回忆

It is you, from the beginning to the end, who swallowed the whole of me.

看不出什么结局, 自始至终全是你, 让我投入太彻底

If it’s a tragedy, why am I dressed up to play the meeting and parting?

故事如果注定悲剧, 何苦给我美丽演出相聚和别离

On this starless night, I can only attract you with my tears.

没有星星的夜里, 我用泪光吸引你

All I can say is “please let me forget you”, with a tearful smile.

既然爱你不能言语, 只能微笑哭泣让我从此忘了你

The song was actually written by two male artists (lyrics by Xu Changde 许常德, music by Ji Zhongping 季忠平), but its handling of emotional anxiety is typically female. This kind of separation between the sexual identity of the song writers and the texts, though common in Chinese tradition as explained above, is rare in Chinese pop music today. But the way to deal with sexual anxiety has been conventional, unchanged for millennia. The song draws back into regret and depression. There are indeed words of protest in the song; but they are so mild that they do not amount even to a complaint.

On the look of it, anxiety in most female songs is almost diametrically opposed in attitude to the self-glorifying in most of the male songs cited above. In female songs of anxiety, the female addresser seems to be ready to blame herself. The idea of the feminine

being the “weaker sex” has been sustained through the history of Chinese culture, and it still has considerable pressure today, perhaps more in art representation than in reality. The songs might not reflect reality but, instead, continues the art of the past. The result is that women’s fate ends up being depressing in songs.

The second type of reaction in female songs in tackling anxiety is slightly different from that of the first type. The addresser is not very like the conventional “distressed lady,” but more a complaining type, whining about men’s readiness to betray. In the song *Conquest* (征服, lyric and music by Yuan Weiren 袁惟仁, originally sung by Na Ying 那英)⁷:

I am conquered by you as such, drinking the poison. 就这样被你征服, 喝下你藏好的毒
The curtain falls on my play, and my love is buried. 我的剧情已落幕, 我的爱恨已入土

Finally you found a way to decide the winner, 终于你找到一个方式分出了胜负

And the cost is us both breaking to pieces. 输赢的代价是彼此粉身碎骨

Women have to be ready for failure all the time, no matter how tough they are. If she is not willing to accept fate, her anger only further fuels her own anxiety. In contrast with the first type of attitude discussed above, this orientation is more extrovert, even though it is still accepting the fate.

The third type of attitude in female songs tackling anxiety is, possibly, more observable in Chinese society today: i.e. to face the pain sensibly so as to recover one’s dignity. This is quite different from the distress of the first type, or the vehement protesting (both breaking to pieces) of the second type. It is a type of “forsaking” with honor, at least preserving women’s independence by affirming gracefully, and attempting to lessen anxiety. The attitude could be seen in this song *Don’t Cry For Him* (别再为他流泪, lyric by Huang Ting 黄婷, music by Yi Jieqi 易桀齐, originally sung by Ling Jingru 梁静茹)⁸:

You must be tired after the long journey. 你走了太久一定很累

You shouldn’t be blamed for his mistake. 他错了不该你来面对

Just leaving him, I’ll be finished. 离开他就好 就算了

It doesn’t mean the end of your world 离开他不等于你的世界会崩溃

After turning the corner you can still fly. 转个弯你还能飞

This is an attitude that more and more young women are ready to adopt today, refusing, while still crying over the loss of love, to be victimized, so as to assert their independence.

The three different attitudes to tackling anxiety in male and female songs are the circuitous demonstrations of what is happening in Chinese culture today. The songs are conventional only to a certain degree, but in more aspects, they are indications of contemporary changes in gender relations today. Carol Gilligan (1982, 5–23) argues that, in Western pop songs, the main characteristic of male mentality is egocentric, while female mentality is more concerned with the other party. Caring more about others is not women’s shortcoming, but their strong point. Women tend to regard moral dilemmas as relationship rifts that could be patched. Females highlight caring; their caring ethics could be complementary to the ethics of justice, though not its

substitution. The lack of vehement reaction in Chinese female songs may thus be a genuine representation of the social mentality.

Although both men and women have several choices in dealing with anxiety, we still observe that there is a tendency toward aggressiveness in male songs. However, in recent years, there has been emerging a shift of rhetoric in the style of male songs, where the “masculinity” has been consistently toned down. In some songs, there even appears the image of “depressed man,” which leads to a feminization of male songs, even those in the most masculine subgenre of Rock’n Roll. That change makes the stereotype of violent “male anxiety” more nuanced in Chinese culture than might have been thought.

6. The rise of trans songs

The most complicated songs, insofar as the sexual identity of the text is concerned, are trans or cross-sex songs, i.e. songs that can be sung both by men and women, though they are not non-sexual since they all sing about sexual love. In the musical practice today, those songs often take on gender-identity through the singers. Since the singers of those songs are not limited to one sex, they can be only called trans songs. They are identified as such because of three indices as pointed out at the beginning of the essay: first, there are no words in the lyric identifying the singer or the addressee’s sex. Second, in singing practice, whether humming alone or to order in Karaoke, they are suitable for both sexes. Third, they are often performed by singers despite the fact that they have originally been sung by a singer of the opposite sex.

In Chinese popular songs today, trans songs take up an unexpectedly large proportion. I analyzed the list of the top 500 most popular songs (the source of which I described at the beginning of the paper), and came up with an extremely interesting result: among the 500 most popular songs, 97 are male songs, 86 female songs, 75 betwixt-sexes songs, 75 non-sexual songs, and trans songs number as many as 218, or 46% – almost half of all the 500 most popular songs (Lu 2013, 238). Part of the reason could be that there is almost no gender declension in Chinese grammar and even “he” and “she” are homophones (both read as *ta*). Yet, there must be some cultural motivation behind the distribution. This kind of song was seldom seen in traditional Chinese culture where men almost never sang female songs even though “he” and “she” were not only homophones but homographs in the classical Chinese language.

The cross-gender linguistic facility does not mean that these songs are free from emotional anxiety, however. What makes them different from the songs discussed above is that the anxiety seems to be shared by both men and women. In the song *Would You Still Love Me Tomorrow?* (明天你是否依然爱我, lyric by Yang Lide 杨立德, music and originally sung by the male singer Tong Ange 童安格),⁹ the lyrics are as follows:

I understood the rules of pursuing love.

我早已经了解追逐爱情的规则

I deserve none of your love but don’t know what to do.

虽然不能爱你却又不知该如何

One day you'll leave but would you still love me tomorrow?

有一天你会离去但明天你是否依然爱我

Sexual love is only a part of life, but seems to be the most fragile part since it is not under the control of the subject but in the attitude of the other. The ability to love is different from that of being loved. When the two abilities are confused, anxiety of love is then made complicated with sexual identities. Trans songs, for instance, could betray some feminine features when sung by men, and some masculine features when sung by women.

Here, we can see the huge gap between the sexual identity of the texts and those of the singers. Chinese society, even today, is by no means tolerant toward androgyny, and there are a lot of insulting words in the language reserved for anyone with a hint of deviation from heteronormativity. That is part of the contemporary social discipline meted out in respect of sexual issues. Oddly, though, trans songs with androgynous tendencies do not suffer from this prejudice and are much more tolerated, though not as welcomed as in the West. Sandra Bem, using her particular method of testing, argues that most "bisexual" people are psychologically healthier, with a higher sense of dignity, and better adaptability to society (Pedhazur and Tetenbaum 1979). Indeed, androgyny might be more open to many people, Chinese men or women, if they could shake off the conventional sexual codes of thinking and behavior. Although it is not that convenient to be androgynous in social practice in China, trans songs are favored because of the same impulse to be free from sex constraints.

Polly Young-Eisendrath (1997, 47) claims that both men and women have heterosexual sub-personalities: men having anima, and women animus. She points out that although biological sex distinction divides all human beings into two categories and deprives people of all the subtleties and unpredictabilities between self and non-self, this kind of bisexuality could actually amount to a healthy psychic complex. Trans songs are an effective way to build communication between anima and animus within one person. In this way, men and women in society can share feelings that were originally closed to one sex. Only by entering into the mind of others can one understand the other and oneself.

The song *Deliverance* (解脱, lyric by Yao Ruolong 姚若龙, music by Xu Huaqiang 许华强)¹⁰ was originally sung by Zhang Huimei 张惠妹, a female singer, but later performed by successive male singers Tao Zhe 陶喆, and a female singer Zhou Bichang 周笔畅 and others. Indeed, the song has been very popular among young people of both sexes.

Deliverance is to acknowledge that it's a mistake. 解脱是肯承认这是个错

I shouldn't be still reluctant to let you go. 我不应该还不放手

You are free to go, I'm free to live my life. 你有自由走, 我有自由好好过

Deliverance is to go a new direction after tears. 解脱是擦干泪后找个新方向往前走

I shall then have a dream of mine in this wide world. 这世界辽阔我总会实现一个梦想

This is not a song in praise of easy separation. It only shows that, by placing both sexes on an equal footing, trans songs help those who sing it to overcome anxiety due to loss of

love, since singing about anxiety is another way to find solace. Only in this way are men and women on a level playing field as far as the anxiety resulting from unrequited love is concerned.

6. Conclusion

Through the different attitudes of men and women to sex anxiety described and analyzed in this essay, we could see that those attitudes are ostensibly gender-distinct, despite the fact that there has been significant change in China during recent years. Nevertheless, the rise and flourishing of the trans songs are the most salient mark of what has been happening in Chinese society. These songs, expressing anxiety in whatever manner, give rise to a kind of sympathy between men and women by helping the singer to enter the consciousness of the opposite sex. That is why, when more and more young people prefer those trans songs when expressing their sorrow in love lost, Chinese women today might be more or less freer from the millennia-long stigma that women had to carry as the weaker and doomed-to-be-distressed side of a love dyad. The manifestations of sex anxiety in popular songs are no longer as gender-distinct as in the millennia of traditional Chinese society, and to sing about the anxiety of the lost love is no longer a social “privilege” preserved for women alone.

Notes

1. Among the top 500 popular songs on the Baidu.com, the largest search engine in China, 408 (about 81.69% of the total) were love songs (Accessed October 21, 2010. <http://music.baidu.com/top/dayhot>), quoted in Zhenglan Lu (2013, 238).
2. The One-Child Policy was in practice starting from mid-1970s, but the law bill was proclaimed on 29 December 1978, stipulating that it should be in effect on 1 September 1979.
3. From the album (太平盛世) by Tao Zhe (陶喆), EMI (百代), 2005.
4. From the album *A Beautiful Day* (美丽的一天) by Liu Dehua (刘德华), EMI (百代), 2002.
5. From the album *Happier than me* (比我幸福) by Chen Xiaodong (陈晓东), UMG (环球唱片), 2000.
6. From the album *If the Cloud Knew* (如果云知道) by Xu Ruyun (许茹芸), What's Music International Incorporated (上华唱片), 1996.
7. From the album *Conquest* (征服) by Na Ying (那英), EMI (百代), 1998.
8. From the album *Don't Cry For Him* (别再为他流泪) by Liang Jingru (梁静茹), B in Music (相信音乐), 2009.
9. From the album (其实你不懂我的心) by Tong Ange (童安格), PolyGram (宝丽金唱片公司), 1989.
10. From the album *Sister* (姐妹) by Zhang Huimei (张惠妹), Forward Music (丰华唱片公司), 1996.

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