Música Hodie | ISSN: 2317-6776 DOI: 10.5216/mh.v26.84997

Once upon a Time in Hong Kong: Intertextuality in Musical Parody as Nostalgia in the Chinese Cinema

Era Uma Vez em Hong Kong: Intertextualidade na Paródia Musical enquanto Nostalgia no Cinema Chinês

Mao Sijie
Department of Music, Jiangxi Institute of Applied Science and Technology, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China
Department of Music, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia
gs58236@student.upm.edu.my

Chow Ow Wei
Department of Music, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia
chowwei@upm.edu.my
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Owwei-Chow

Abstract: Hong Kong cinema before the turn of the 21st century is highly characterized by commercialization that particularly embodies genres of costume drama, action movie, romance, erotica, as well as comedy. In the latter, the complexity of cinema as a storytelling medium is heightened when classic works, ancient costumes, fairy tales, and movie stars paradoxically blend with a 'nonsense' [无厘头] style filled with irony, satire, or parody, while making references to figures or issues of modern times. However, after this typical filmmaking style, established since the 1980s, became unpopular after the millennium, recurring screenings of such comedy films on contemporary streaming media mark a bygone era, evoking nostalgic sentimentality among a typical generation of Chinese audiences. Drawing on theories of parody and intertextuality, this paper aims to inspect the intertextuality of parody through audio-visual presentation in Chinese cinema, as well

as to attempt tracing how musical parody is employed in two selected comedies, namely *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* (1993) and *Chinese Odyssey 2002* (2002), in order to illuminate a trajectory of nostalgia among the Chinese audience. With micro-analysis applied to selected film clips, a comparison of hypertext and hypotext is presented to illustrate the multifaceted contexts of the audio and visuals. The result reveals two modes of parody originally theorized in relation to music videos that, in the selected films, produce humor through adaptation, incongruity, exaggeration, and playful recontextualization. It further opens up the possibility of reconsidering musical parody as a rhetorical and compositional strategy in contemporary film music.

Keywords: Musical parody, Chinese cinema, comedy, nostalgia, intertextuality

Resumo: O cinema de Hong Kong anterior à virada do século XXI foi fortemente marcado pela comercialização e pela diversidade de gêneros, incluindo filmes de época, de ação, de romance, de erotismo e de comédia. Neste último gênero, a complexidade narrativa intensifica-se quando obras clássicas, universos de época, contos populares e estrelas de cinema se combinam, de modo aparentemente paradoxal, com o estilo conhecido como "nonsense" [无厘头], caracterizado por ironia, sátira e paródia, bem como por referências a personagens, discursos e questões da modernidade. No entanto, depois que esse modelo de produção, consolidado desde os anos 1980, perdeu força após a virada do milênio, a circulação recorrente dessas comédias em plataformas de streaming contemporâneas passou a evocar uma época desaparecida, frequentemente associada a sentimentos nostálgicos entre uma determinada geração de espectadores chineses. Com base nas teorias da paródia e da intertextualidade, este artigo busca examinar a intertextualidade da paródia por meio da apresentação audiovisual no cinema chinês, bem como rastrear a forma como a paródia musical é empregada em duas comédias selecionadas, nomeadamente *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* (1993) e *Chinese Odyssey 2002* (2002),

a fim de iluminar uma trajetória de nostalgia entre o público chinês. Por meio de uma microanálise de trechos selecionados dos filmes, apresenta-se uma comparação entre hipertexto e hipotexto para ilustrar contextos multifacetados no áudio e no visual. O resultado revela dois modos de paródia, originalmente teorizados em relação aos videoclipes, que, nos filmes selecionados, produzem humor por meio da adaptação, da incongruência, do exagero e da recontextualização lúdica. Além disso, abre-se a possibilidade de reconsiderar a paródia musical como estratégia retórica e composicional na música cinematográfica contemporânea.

Palavras-chave: Paródia musical, cinema chinês, comédia, nostalgia, intertextualidade

Submitted on: January 27, 2026
Accepted on: May 30, 2026
Published in: June 2026

1. Introduction

There was a time when Hong Kong cinema was a major anchor for Chinese-language cinema, flourishing across genres such as action, crime, martial arts, and comedy, and becoming an important point of reference in the media culture of many viewers. The comedies of the 1980s and 1990s were particularly notable. Within this cycle, filmmakers developed a widely recognizable comic mode often labeled 'nonsense' [无厘头]. These films often combine, displace, and rework seemingly unrelated elements to create humor or satire (Su, 2013, p. 203). Additionally, some critics describe this style as cartoonish, characterized by bold comedic setups and even vulgarity and obscenity, and argue that it represented a reckless mockery and deconstruction of all forms of power and morality (Xu & Hao, 2011, p. 3). Jeffrey Lau [刘镇伟] was one of the directors associated with this trend, working with performers such as Stephen Chow [周星驰]. Against this backdrop, a number of representative comedies emerged, including *A Chinese Odyssey Part One: Pandora's Box* [大话西游之月光宝盒] (1995), *A Chinese Odyssey Part Two: Cinderella* [大话西游之大圣娶亲] (1995), *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* [东成西就] (1993), and *Chinese Odyssey 2002* [天下无双] (2002).

Intertextuality provides a useful framework for understanding how such comic effects are produced. It holds that all texts, whether written, spoken, formal, informal, artistic, or vernacular, are interconnected (Almaaroof & Jabir, 2023, p. 364). From this perspective, the combination, displacement, and reworking of familiar stories, characters, scenes, dialogues, and musical elements in Hong Kong nonsense comedy can be understood as forms of intertextual play. Such intertextual play reflects popular culture's pursuit of diversity, freedom, and playfulness, thereby presenting a style that distinguishes itself from the past (Yang, 2015, p. 63). Among these intertextual practices, parody is one of the primary methods of generating humor in Hong Kong cinema, and its recurring presence in

this comic tradition has made it closely associated with Hong Kong comedy among many Chinese-speaking audiences (Wang, 2008, p. 70). For instance, the *A Chinese Odyssey* series parodies the classic Chinese novel Journey to the West [西游记]. The wise and brave Monkey King [孙悟空], typically indifferent to women, is humorously transformed into the lovestruck and cowardly character Joker [至尊宝], who is presented as the reincarnation of the Monkey King. Meanwhile, the devout monk Tang Sanzang [唐三藏] is portrayed as a nagging nuisance. Filmmakers create a sense of 'defamiliarisation' by transforming classic narratives, character images, scenes, shots, dialogues, and musical elements, thereby achieving comedic and humorous effects throughout the films (Chen, 2020, p. 92).

While the "nonsense" style of Hong Kong comedy has largely disappeared as a dominant mode of film production since the turn of the millennium, its cultural presence has not simply faded. Instead, these films continue to circulate across television reruns, streaming platforms, and online media, where they are encountered not only as complete films but also as fragmented audiovisual materials. These fragments include iconic quotations, scenes, and short clips that are repeatedly reused, imitated, and reenacted in different media contexts. Cui (2022), for instance, observes that *A Chinese Odyssey* carries strong youth memories for many viewers, and that its memorable lines have entered everyday speech, while later short videos and television dramas frequently quote, imitate, and reenact them. Such ongoing circulation shows that these films remain culturally active beyond their original theatrical and historical contexts.

Yet within existing scholarship on Hong Kong cinema, and particularly on Hong Kong comedy, relatively little attention has been paid to the concrete audiovisual mechanisms that structure and enable such encounters. Recent work has tended to situate comedy within broader frameworks such as genre traditions and historical trends (Law, 2022), or to approach

major comic figures through authorship, industry, and visual comic style (Bettinson and Lee, 2024). Studies of afterlives and circulation have further emphasized platform practices, including the reuse and transformation of familiar clips and quotations in participatory remix cultures (Chung, 2022; Chew, 2020). Above all, this scholarship clarifies how Hong Kong comedy travels, endures, and is culturally remembered, yet it rarely offers sustained close analysis of how specific audiovisual operations within the films themselves, including musical parody, are constructed and coordinated at the levels of sound, performance, and editing. Film music is crucial here, not only because it binds disparate image sequences, but also because it shapes scene development through rhythm and timing (Kalinak, 2023, p. 1). Musical parody therefore provides a useful entry point for examining how sound, image, performance, and editing work together to produce intertextual comic effects.

2. Parody

Parody derives from the Greek *paroidia*, literally meaning 'beside the song' (Hariman, 2008, 249). The etymology highlights the long historical backdrop of parodic music. It also points to the genre's ambiguity, since parody functions both as a new text and as a reflection on the original work (Erickson, 2013). Traditionally, parody has been defined as a form of imitation that preserves the formal or stylistic features of an earlier work while replacing or altering its content, thereby producing incongruity between form and meaning (Kiremidjian, 1969, p. 232). Hutcheon describes this relation more broadly as repetition with critical difference (1985, p. 32). Parody, therefore, does not simply reproduce a prior text. It repeats recognizable features, shifts them into another context, and invites the audience to register both similarity and difference. Its comic effect often

arises from this double movement: viewers recognize the source, but also notice how the source has been displaced, exaggerated, or made incongruous within the new text (Jewell & Louise, 2012, p. 6).

Parody works intertextually because it places a new text in relation to an earlier text that the audience is expected to recognize. Genette describes this relation as hypertextuality, in which a later text, or hypertext, transforms an earlier text, or hypotext (Martin & Ringham, 2006, p. 99). In film, this transformation may occur through plot, character design, costume, dialogue, performance, framing, editing, music, or sound. The viewer is not only asked to follow the new scene, but also to compare it with remembered texts, genres, and styles. As Jewell and Louise argue, the appreciation of parodic works requires familiarity with the original works being imitated, since only such familiarity allows viewers to identify which texts, stories, or artistic styles are being parodied (2012, p. 6).

Musical parody narrows this intertextual process to the level of sound. It brings familiar songs, melodies, musical styles, or sonic cues into new audiovisual contexts, where they may be recognized as references to earlier texts, viewing experiences, or cultural moments. In film, such recognition is shaped not by music alone, but by the coordination of sound with image, performance, and editing, since film music can organize narrative movement, rhythm, timing, and audiovisual meaning (Kalinak, 2023, p. 1). In such cases, the return of familiar sound can be both comic and temporal: it may produce humor by making the earlier sound incongruous in the new scene, while also marking a distance between past experience and present recognition. This temporal distance is central to nostalgia, which is commonly understood as a remembrance of and longing for the past (Chow, 2001, p. 210), and which often emerges through the relation between past experiences and present acts of remembering (Legg, 2004, p. 100). In cinema, recognizable audiovisual fragments, including scenes, dialogues, songs,

melodies, and other sonic cues, may reactivate emotional and symbolic attachments to particular stories or scenes (Kim et al., 2017, p. 283). Musical parody, then, does not simply use familiar music to create humor. It can allow familiar sounds to return in altered form, making it possible for comic recognition and nostalgic remembrance to arise from the same audiovisual encounter.

3. Research Material

This study selects two Jeffrey Lau costume comedies, *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* and *Chinese Odyssey 2002*, because both films place parody at the center of their humor and build their stories by rewriting familiar texts, character types, and widely recognizable cultural references. In other words, the films make their parodic strategies particularly visible and provide useful material for comparing how intertextual transformation operates across narrative, performance, dialogue, and music. On this basis, the research materials consist of audiovisual segments from these two films, with particular attention to two musical and dance scenes that offer concentrated moments where parody is staged through both sound and image, namely "Wo Love Ni" [我Love你] in *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* and "A Drunk Song" [醉一场] in *Chinese Odyssey 2002*.

The Eagle Shooting Heroes is chosen because it turns a familiar wuxia source into spoof and comic exaggeration. Its intertextual relation to Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time* [东邪西毒] (1993) is especially important here. Both films draw on characters and narrative elements from Jin Yong's[1] [金庸] "The Legend of the Condor Heroes"[2] [射雕英雄传], and *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* was produced during the prolonged production of *Ashes of Time*. *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* used the same group of stars from *Ashes*

1 Jin Yong (1924—2018), a Hong Kong writer, authored numerous martial arts novels, many of which have been adapted into films and television series. Together with Gu Long [古龙] (1938—1985)and Liang Yusheng [梁羽生] (1924—2009), he is celebrated as one of the 'Three Musketeers' of Chinese martial arts fiction.

2 "The Legend of the Condor Heroes", a lengthy martial arts novel, is set during the historical period from the fifth year of Emperor Ningzong [宁宗] of Song's reign (1199) to the death of Genghis Khan [成吉思汗] (1227). It narrates the journey of Guo Jing [郭靖], who evolves from a young man seeking to avenge his father's death into a revered hero dedicated to serving his country and people. This novel has been adapted multiple times into films, television series, and video games bearing the same name.

of Time and was made as a rapidly completed New Year comedy, partly in response to the financial pressure caused by the slow progress of Wong's film (Wanpiqinqin, 2020). This production background makes the two films closely connected: while *Ashes of Time* turns Jin Yong's wuxia world into a melancholic and highly stylized martial arts film, *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* uses many of the same actors and source materials to create slapstick parody.

Although it borrows names, character types, and a martial-arts setting associated with the novel, the film's plot is largely unrelated and focuses primarily on humor, with actors delivering over-the-top performances in a spoof format. The primary narrative centers on two members of the royal family who conspire to poison the king and seize the throne, only to find themselves tracking the imperial seal to the Third Princess's location, portrayed by Brigitte Lin [林青霞]. Amid a series of chases and misunderstandings, the Third Princess receives assistance from her martial arts master and fellow disciples, culminating in a life-or-death battle with the royal conspirators. Several character- and prop-based reversals further demonstrate how the film parodies through incongruity. Zhou Botong [周伯通], traditionally depicted as a male figure in the novel, is played by Carina Lau [刘嘉玲] and presented through exaggerated comic behaviour. This Zhou Botong is not only infatuated with her senior but also displays interest in men. The Third Princess employs a pirated kung fu technique, wreaking havoc on friends and foes alike, often with explosive results. Ouyang Feng [欧阳锋], played by Tony Leung Chiu-wai [梁朝伟], suffers a comic defeat after being thwarted by a boot used as a projectile weapon, and he is continuously outsmarted by the handsome yet naive Hong Qigong [洪七公], portrayed by Jacky Cheung [张学友], who leaves him with swollen ears and sausage-like lips. The film's climax unfolds in an Arabian-style palace, echoing a plot from One Thousand and One Nights, with flying boots humorously replacing the traditional magic carpet.

These features make the film a strong example of parody that reshapes a canonical source while also creating space for musical and performance-based comedy, which is why it is well-suited to the musical scene selected for analysis.

Chinese Odyssey 2002 is selected for similar reasons, as it also makes extensive use of parody while drawing on a different range of recognizable cultural materials, including folk tales and film references. The film narrates the story of Emperor Zhengde [正德], played by Tony Leung Chiu-wai [梁朝伟], and Princess Wushuang [无双], portrayed by Faye Wong [王菲], who secretly leave the imperial palace to enjoy themselves in southern China. There, they become romantically entangled with Li Yilong [李一龙], a noodle shop owner played by Chang Chen [张震], and his sister Li Fengjie [李凤姐], played by Zhao Wei [赵薇], in a small town. Law (2015, p. 404) reads the story as a fusion of two traditional folk narratives, *You Long Xi Feng* [游龙戏凤], also known as *Mei Long Zhen* [梅龙镇], and *Butterfly Lovers* [梁山伯与祝英台], both of which have commonly provided material for regional Chinese operas. Mei Long Zhen depicts the emperor's playful escapade, which serves as the prototype for his romance with Li Fengjie in *Chinese Odyssey 2002*. *Butterfly Lovers* tells the story of a wealthy young woman who disguises herself as a man and meets her lover while traveling, serving as the prototype for the romantic plot between Princess Wushuang and Li Yilong in *Chinese Odyssey 2002*. In addition to these folk sources, the film also parodies scenes and dialogue from Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express* [重庆森林] (1994), making its intertextual mode especially visible through the comic rewriting of recognizable film style. In *Chinese Odyssey 2002*, a character reflects: "At that moment, he was only 7.08 meters away from me, and in less than a quarter of an incense stick's time, I decided he was a decent man with good skills, so I chose to introduce him to my sister. [当时我和他的距离是七公尺零八公分，在不够四分一柱香的时间，我做了个决定，我看他人品不错，身手也挺好，所以我决定把他介绍给我妹妹...]". The phrasing closely echoes

Officer 223's voice-over in Chungking Express, especially its use of precise physical distance, compressed time, and romantic decision-making: "The closest I got to her was just 0.01 cm; I knew nothing about her, and six hours later, she fell in love with another man [我和她最接近的时候，我们之间的距离只有0.01公分，我对她一无所知，六个钟头之后，她喜欢了另一个男人]". This parody not only serves as a nod to Wong Kar-wai but also injects a comedic twist into the narrative. Together, these layers of folk-tale rewriting and film-to-film quotation make *Chinese Odyssey 2002* a useful counterpart to *The Eagle Shooting Heroes*, because both films show how parody reorganizes familiar cultural texts, albeit through different source materials and comic techniques.

Within these two films, the analysis focuses primarily on two musical and dance scenes, since these scenes provide clear, bounded events in which music, lyrics, performance, and visual rhythm work together, and they allow the operation of musical parody to be described in detail. The selected scenes include 'Wo Love Ni', performed by Hong Qigong in *The Eagle Shooting Heroes*, and 'A Drunk Song' sung by Li Yilong [李一龙] and Princess Wushuang [无双] in *Chinese Odyssey 2002*. To illustrate the intricate relationship between music and text, this paper conducts a microanalysis of selected film segments and provides visual and auditory transcriptions. The focus of the microanalysis is to identify specific markers or boundaries that clearly delineate the start and end of events (Erickson, 1992, p. 215). This method allows for phased observation, gradually revealing the narrative's development. The transcription approach draws on an audiovisual transcription system used by Ferguson (2020)[3], which simultaneously presents the main melodic line, lyrics, and the rhythmic pacing of film visuals. This aids in the static representation of both musical and visual elements.

3 This audiovisual analysis method borrows from several similar theories such as Michel Chion's concept of "points of synchronization", the work of Rick Altman, and other audiovisual transcriptions by Claudia Gorbman, Royal Brown, Colin Roust, Sean Atkinson, and Frank Lehman (Ferguson, 2020, p.13).

4. Musical Parody in *The Eagle Shooting Heroes*

In *The Eagle Shooting Heroes*, Hong Qigong's performance of "Wo Love Ni" offers a concentrated example of musical parody built on the recognizability of Rossini's *William Tell Overture*. The film draws specifically on the overture's widely recognized final section, whose vigorous rhythm, rapid tempo, trumpet-led orchestral texture, and forward-driving momentum convey heroic propulsion. Rather than simply quoting this musical frame, the sequence transforms it through vocalization, slowed tempo, flattened timbre, repetitive bilingual lyrics, Chinese opera-style percussion, and exaggerated audiovisual synchronization. The borrowed melody remains identifiable, but it is displaced from heroic orchestral energy into comic excess. This tension between recognition and deformation provides the basis for the scene's musical parody.

A closer examination of the musical process shows how "Wo Love Ni" operates as a parody at the levels of melody, tempo, timbre, and arrangement. As shown in Figure 1, the melody directly references Rossini's *William Tell Overture*, but the original orchestral passage is converted into a voice-centered comic song. In Rossini's overture, the familiar final section is driven by firm orchestral sonority and rapid march-like momentum. In "Wo Love Ni", however, this heroic energy is deliberately deflated. The tempo is slowed, weakening the original sense of urgency, while Jacky Cheung's flattened, compressed, duck-like timbre removes the melody from ideals of lyrical or heroic singing. The borrowed Rossinian theme is thus made to function as a bodily comic gesture rather than as a grand or martial musical sign.

The accompanying percussion further reshapes the overture's sonic identity. Instead of preserving its orchestral brilliance, the arrangement inserts Chinese opera-style percussion and intermittent strikes of a wooden temple block. These dry percussive sounds punctuate Hong Qigong's

exaggerated delivery, interrupting the symphonic frame with a theatrical and comic texture. At the level of lyric organization, this comic transformation is also achieved through the interspersed repetition of the bilingual lyrics "I love you." The lyric "我爱你 / I love you love you love you love you love you love you I love you / 我爱你我爱你我爱你你你我爱你你你" exemplifies this strategy, relying on persistent repetition rather than semantic progression. This repetition unfolds across the musical phrase, accumulating in intensity through rhythmic insistence and vocal exaggeration rather than rapid tempo. Romantic affection is therefore expressed not through melodic development or lyrical refinement, but through exaggerated emotional escalation.

Figure 1. An excerpt of audiovisual transcription of "Wo Love Ni" (01:09:00–01:10:32)

Source: The Eagle Shooting Heroes (1993), transcribed by Mao Sijie

The comic effect is intensified through visual and performative design. During the performance (Figure 2), Hong Qigong alternates between sentimental posturing and sudden, frenetic movement, producing humor through physical excess that mirrors the music's repetitive momentum. These gestures do not simply illustrate the song; they physicalize its rhythmic

and timbral distortions. The sequence also cuts to Duan Zhixing performing on wind and percussion instruments with improvised tools such as chopsticks and spoons. His swollen ears and sausage-like mouth further distort conventional standards of appearance, making musical performance itself appear grotesque and slapstick. Through these visual details, the film turns the deformation of music into visible bodily comedy.

Figure 2. Stills from the musical number 'Wo Love Ni' (01:09:00–01:10:32) in *The Eagle Shooting Heroes*

Source: The Eagle Shooting Heroes (1993)

The top two images depict Hong Qigong's exaggerated bodily movements during his performance, while the bottom two images show Duan Zhixing playing wind and percussion instruments using chopsticks and spoons.

Beyond sonic and visual exaggeration, the sequence also disrupts a conventional ideal of restrained romantic expression. A conventional Confucian-inflected ideal of emotional expression is often associated with the principle that feelings may arise from genuine sentiment but should remain restrained by ritual

propriety [发乎情止于礼]. Courtship is thus commonly associated with subtlety and implication rather than overt declaration. In stark contrast, "Wo Love Ni" articulates affection through blunt, repetitive, and unabashed verbal insistence. Coupled with the borrowed melody's residual heroic associations and the song's rhythmic insistence, this excessive repetition produces a comic mismatch between musical grandeur and emotional triviality.

The sequence's parody can thus be understood as emerging from a dialectic between recognition and deformation. Rossini's melody remains legible as a familiar musical frame, but the film alters several conditions under which that frame is heard and seen: heroic propulsion is weakened through slower tempo; orchestral authority is reduced to a voice-centered and timbrally flattened performance; symphonic fullness is interrupted by Chinese opera-style percussion and dry wooden fish [muyu 木鱼] strikes; and affective grandeur is redirected toward a blunt, repetitive, and linguistically hybrid declaration of love. The visual performance reinforces this deformation by transforming musical rhythm into bodily excess, so that the borrowed melody is not only heard differently but also seen as a comic performance. In this sense, the musical strategy employed in *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* aligns with what Boxman-Shabtai (2018, p. 15) describes as "frame duplication", a form of parody that replicates an existing musical framework in order to stage a recognizably similar yet contextually transformed performance. The sequence does not satirize or critique Rossini's William Tell Overture as a musical source. Rather, it converts the overture into a playful audiovisual resource whose recognisability enables deliberate imitation, while its deformation generates humor. As a result, the familiar melody returns not as a pure recovery of the original, but as an altered comic trace of earlier musical memory.

5. Musical Parody in *Chinese Odyssey 2002*

Another comedy directed by Jeffrey Lau, *Chinese Odyssey 2002*, offers a different mode of musical parody from *The Eagle Shooting Heroes*. Whereas "Wo Love Ni" duplicates a recognizable orchestral frame and subjects it to comic deformation, *Chinese Odyssey 2002* extends a Huangmei Opera [黄梅戏] framework across altered lyrics, popular vocal delivery, informal bodily performance, and cinematic ensemble participation. The film is widely recognized as a Huangmei Opera film, and its comic strategy depends on the audience's familiarity with this operatic tradition. Huangmei Opera films are rooted in traditional Chinese opera and characteristically combine folk singing practices such as *shan ge* [山歌, mountain song], commonly associated with rural regions, with popular music, dance, and modern cinematic techniques (Wei, 2013). Within this generic foundation, the repeated use and transformation of "The Couple Returns Home Together" [夫妻双双把家还], a well-known piece from *Fairy Princess* [天仙配], becomes central to the film's musical parody.

In *Fairy Princess*, "The Couple Returns Home Together" articulates an idealized image of conjugal harmony. The song appears after the Jade Emperor's [玉皇大帝] youngest daughter assists her mortal lover, Dong Yong [董永], by enlisting her sisters to weave ten bolts of brocade overnight, thereby shortening his servitude and enabling the couple to return home together. The lyrics unfold as an antiphonal duet between the lovers, with alternating lines such as "Birds on the trees pair up together" [树上的鸟儿成双对] and "Green waters and hills wear a smiling face" [绿水青山带笑颜], culminating in the refrain "Together, as husband and wife, we return home" [夫妻双双把家还]. The song's paired imagery, balanced lyric structure, and tender duet form present marital union as natural, harmonious, and socially legitimate.

Musically, this vocal segment exemplifies key features of Huangmei Opera. Its melodic writing follows the principle of *yizi xingqiang* [依字行腔], a lyrics-driven practice in which melodic motion closely follows the tonal contours and verbal articulation of the text (Zhang, 2016, p. 222). This produces a vocal line that is direct, memorable, and easy to sing. Structurally, the melody is organized around balanced couplets, while the accompaniment typically employs percussion instruments such as *tanggu* [堂鼓, a traditional Chinese drum], cymbals, and gongs, alongside *bangqiang* [帮腔], or supporting vocal responses, which reinforce narrative flow and musical texture (Zhang, 2023, p. 59). These features are important because they establish a recognizable operatic frame that *Chinese Odyssey 2002* can later extend, loosen, and redirect toward comedy.

As depicted in Figure 3, the interlude "A Drunk Song" reutilizes and transforms this Huangmei operatic framework by adapting both melody and lyrics to the film's narrative context. The melody evokes the familiar world of "The Couple Returns Home Together," but its affective function is redirected. Instead of preserving the original emphasis on conjugal devotion, the adapted song shifts the duet structure toward male homosocial bonding between Wushuang and Li Yilong. The parody, therefore, does not arise from a rejection of Huangmei Opera. Rather, it emerges from the incongruous relocation of a conjugal duet form into a scene of drunken camaraderie, cross-dressed performance, and comic emotional ambiguity.

Figure 3. An excerpt of audiovisual transcription of "A Drunk Song" (00:56:58–00:59:15)

Source: Chinese Odyssey 2002 (2002), transcribed by Mao Sijie

Within this song, Wushuang sings, "Good brother, come and see / Chopsticks come in pairs / Shoulder to shoulder, head-to-head, just like the two of us" [阿龙哥, 你来瞧, 小小竹筷是一双, 同根生来并肩长, 好像你我一模样]. Li Yilong responds, "Little brother, you are wrong / Toothpicks can't be strong / Chopsticks are fun / But our friendship strongly runs" [好贤弟, 莫说笑, 谁都比那牙签强, 筷子不过是酒桌友, 哪能比作咱哥两]. This lyrical exchange preserves the antiphonal structure of the Huangmei duet, but it replaces the original conjugal imagery with objects from the banquet table. Birds, green waters, and smiling hills give way to chopsticks, toothpicks, and drinking-table friendship. This semantic lowering is central to the comic effect: the song retains the formal expectation of romantic complementarity but redirects it toward playful brotherhood, drunken banter, and bodily proximity.

The humor of this transformation depends on the tension between musical familiarity and lyrical displacement. In "The Couple Returns Home Together," paired natural images present marital union as part of an ordered and benevolent world. In "A Drunk Song," the same logic of pairing is deliberately trivialized through everyday objects. Chopsticks come in pairs, but their association with the dining table makes them comic substitutes for birds and lovers. Toothpicks further lower the register of the imagery, turning the duet's emotional parallelism into a joking comparison between objects of unequal strength and value. The parody is therefore produced not simply by changing the lyrics, but by preserving the duet's relational structure while altering the scale, register, and affective meaning of its imagery.

Visually, the sequence extends this displacement through bodily performance. The visual parody is built on the recognisability of Huangmei Opera's duet staging, especially its paired positioning, frontal orientation, stylized hand gestures, and measured bodily movement. As shown in Figure 4, Wushuang and Li Yilong's gestures recall postures associated with traditional Chinese opera, but they do so in a deliberately loosened and informal manner. Their bodies cite operatic form without fully submitting to its disciplined theatricality. This partial citation is central to the parody: the scene remains recognizable as an operatic performance, yet its gestures are casual, cinematic, and comically unstable. The performers' movements align with the song's antiphonal progression, but their informality prevents the sequence from becoming a straightforward revival of Huangmei Opera. Instead, operatic posture is translated into a comic cinematic register.

Figure 4. Stills from the musical numbers "The Couple Returns Home Together" in Huangmei Opera (left) and "A Drunk Song" in *Chinese Odyssey 2002* (right)

Source: Open source (left), and Chinese Odyssey 2002 (right)

Through this combination of adapted melody, reoriented lyrics, loosened vocal delivery, collective responses, and stylized bodily performance, *Chinese Odyssey 2002* deploys musical parody to rework operatic tradition into a contemporary comedic idiom. The sequence does not mock Huangmei Opera as an outdated form. Instead, it demonstrates how Huangmei Opera can be made comic by extending its recognizable structures into incongruous social and cinematic situations. The familiar duet form remains audible and visible, but its original association with marital harmony is redirected toward drunken friendship, gender ambiguity, and playful emotional excess.

This approach to musical parody is not confined to a single sequence. Throughout the film's score, melodic material associated with "The Couple Returns Home Together" is adapted into a range of songs and instrumental cues with varying rhythms, orchestrations, and tempos, including "Happy Gathering" [喜相逢], "Intro" [序曲], and "Drinking Alone" [独饮]. While the orchestration predominantly employs traditional Chinese instruments, it also incorporates instruments and timbres associated with modern screen music, including the harp and electronic sounds produced by synthesizers, as heard in cues such as "Out of the Palace" [出宫] and "Passing Glances"

[眼波流]. These hybrid arrangements inflect Huangmei operatic material with a modern and occasionally anachronistic quality, reinforcing the film's playful negotiation between tradition and contemporaneity.

Within this broader compositional strategy, the musical treatment of "A Drunk Song" aligns with what Boxman-Shabtai (2018, p. 15) describes as "frame extension," a form of parody that extends an existing musical framework to accommodate new meanings within a loosely structured reproduction. The sequence does not reproduce "The Couple Returns Home Together" as a fixed object. Instead, it stretches the Huangmei operatic frame across altered lyrics, informal bodily performance, popular vocal delivery, cinematic ensemble participation, and hybridized musical textures. In this sense, parody operates through extension rather than duplication: the source framework remains recognizable, but its affective and narrative functions are redirected toward comic homochirality, drunken play, and contemporary screen performance. For viewers familiar with *Fairy Princess* or Huangmei Opera film, this extension of the duet frame may also invite a mediated form of nostalgia. What returns is not only a familiar melody, but a potentially remembered mode of operatic cinema, including antiphonal singing, paired imagery, stylized gesture, and the ideal of harmonious union. Yet this return is filtered through drunken banter, gender ambiguity, and informal screen performance rather than faithful revival.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined how musical parody operates within two Hong Kong comedies, *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* and *Chinese Odyssey 2002*, by tracing the intertextual transformation of recognizable musical materials across different audiovisual contexts. The microanalysis has identified two modes of musical parody in these two films: "frame duplication" and "frame extension." In *The Eagle Shooting Heroes*, "Wo Love Ni"

works through frame duplication, retaining the recognizable framework of Rossini's *William Tell Overture* while deforming its heroic musical associations through comic vocalization, bodily excess, and hybrid sound design. In *Chinese Odyssey 2002*, "A Drunk Song" works through frame extension, stretching the Huangmei Opera framework of "The Couple Returns Home Together" into a comic scene of altered lyrics, informal performance, gender ambiguity, and contemporary screen style. These two modes show that musical parody does not simply quote familiar music but reorganizes an existing musical frame through new audiovisual conditions.

The two modes identified in this study should not be understood as an exhaustive account of musical parody. In addition to frame duplication and frame extension, Boxman-Shabtai (2018, pp. 15–27) also identifies frame abandonment, thematic frame transformation, and meta-critical frame transformation as further configurations of musical parody. Although her study focuses on music videos rather than film music, these categories provide a useful vocabulary for describing how musical parody may operate across different audiovisual media. The present study suggests that similar parodic configurations can also be observed in Hong Kong comedy cinema, though their function is not always critical. In the two cases examined here, musical parody is used less to satirize the source material than to produce humor through adaptation, incongruity, exaggeration, and playful recontextualization. Whether in music videos or film music, such parodic strategies depend on the relation between an original framework and its transformed version, allowing familiar musical materials to return as altered traces of earlier audiovisual memory.

In recent years, this form of musical parody, marked by carnival-like quotation, free adaptation, and stylistic hybridity, appears to have become increasingly rare in contemporary Chinese comedy cinema. While existing music continues to be widely used, it is more often presented in its original form, rather

than subjected to overt parody or playful distortion. Yet musical parody can still be reconsidered as a rhetorical strategy within contemporary film music, particularly in high-pressure social contexts. After all, it was frequently used in Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s, offering audiences moments of laughter that also served as a temporary outlet for dissatisfaction and a means of easing collective anxiety (Li, 2021, p. 77). From this perspective, such strategies need not be confined to their historical moment. In contemporary high-pressure environments, similar desires for accessible and affective audiovisual experiences remain evident, as reflected in the widespread consumption of short-form video content that favors rapid gratification over narrative complexity. Seen in this light, musical parody may be understood not merely as a curious phenomenon in Hong Kong film history, but as a viable rhetorical strategy and compositional possibility in contemporary film music, capable of producing humor through exaggeration, incongruity, and repetition.

In addition, those Hong Kong comedies that once enjoyed widespread popularity can also function as hypotextual resources in contemporary film production, providing readily usable materials for subsequent parodic practices. Circulating quotations not only provoke laughter; they also allow audiences to revisit earlier viewing experiences. Many viewers continue to cherish these "beautiful pasts." After all, it is difficult to find a Chinese audience member who is entirely unfamiliar with the iconic line from *A Chinese Odyssey*: "There was once a genuine love placed in front of me, but I did not treasure it. It was too late to be sorry once I'd lost it. This is the world's worst suffering. If Heaven could grant me another chance, I would tell that girl three words: I love you. If I had to place a time limit on this love, I hope so... for ten millennia [曾经有一份真诚的爱情放在我面前，我没有珍惜，等我失去的时候我才后悔莫及，人世间最痛苦的事莫过于此。如果上天能够给我一个再来一次的机会，我会对那个女孩子说三个字：我爱你。如果非要在这份爱上加上一个期限，我希望是……一万年]."

References

ALMAAROOF, Ansam Riyadh Abdullah; AL-DIN JABIR, Amina Nidham. Intertextuality as a postmodern trait: the Simpsons sitcom. **Tasnim International Journal for Human, Social and Legal Sciences**, v. 2, n. 2, p. 362–371, 2023.

BETTINSON, Gary; LEE, Vivian P. Y. (org.). **The Cinema of Stephen Chow**. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024.

BOXMAN-SHABTAI, Lillian. Reframing the popular: a new approach to parody. **Poetics**, v. 67, n. 4, p. 1–12, 2018.

CHEN, Qian [陈倩]. 喜剧电影音乐探析——以宁浩"疯狂"三部曲为例 [An analysis of comedy film music, taking Ning Hao's "Crazy" trilogy as an example]. **Chinese Literature and Art Criticism**, n. 10, p. 90–97, 2020.

CHEW, Matthew M. Discovering the digital Stephen Chow: the transborder influence of Chow's films on the Chinese Internet in the 2010s. *Global Media and China*, v. 5, n. 2, p. 124–137, 2020. Available in: https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436420928058. Access in: 28 jan. 2026.

CHUNG, Elaine. YouTube vidding and participatory memories of Stephen Chow's stardom in South Korea. **Archiv orientální**, v. 90, n. 3, p. 531–564, 2022.

CHOW, Rey. A Souvenir of love. In: Esther C. M. Yau. **At full speed : Hong Kong cinema in a borderless world**. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. p. 209–230.

CUI, Ting [崔汀]. 喜欢周星驰需要几个理由？6部豆瓣高分电影告诉你 [How many reasons do you need to love Stephen Chow? Six top-rated films tell the story]. **Tencent [**腾讯网**]**, 22 jun. 2022. Available in: https://news.qq.com/rain/a/20220622A0C1W300. Access in: 28 jan. 2026.

ERICKSON, Frederick. Ethnographic microanalysis of interaction. In: LECOMPTE, Margaret Diane; MILLROY, Wendy L.; PREISSLE, Judith (org.). **The handbook of qualitative research in education**. New York: Academic Press, 1992. p. 201–225.

ERICKSON, Kristofer. **Evaluating the impact of parody on the exploitation of copyright works: an empirical study of music video content on YouTube**. London: Intellectual Property Office UK, 2013.

FERGUSON, Brent Alan. **Intertextuality in the movie music video**. 2020. PhD thesis, University of Kansas.

HARIMAN, Robert. Political parody and public culture. **Quarterly Journal of Speech**, v. 94, n. 3, p. 247–272, 2008.

HUTCHEON, Linda. **A theory of parody: the teachings of twentieth-century art forms**. New York: Methuen, 1985.

JEWELL, Paul; LOUISE, Jennie. It's just a joke: defining and defending (musical) parody. **Australian Review of Public Affairs**, v. 10, n. 2, p. 1–12, 2012.

KALINAK, Kathryn. **Film music: a very short introduction**. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023.

KIM, Seong; KIM, Sangkyun; Petrick, James F. The effect of film nostalgia on involvement, familiarity, and behavioral intentions. **Journal of Travel Research**, v. 58, n.2, p. 283–297, 2017.

KIREMIDJIAN, G. D. The aesthetics of parody. **Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism**, v. 28, n. 2, p. 231–242, 1969.

LAW, Fiona Yuk-wa. City of laughter: on the traditions and trends of Hong Kong comedy films. **Archiv orientální**, v. 90, n. 3, p. 575–593, 2022.

LEGG, Stephen. Memory and nostalgia. **Cultural geographies**, v. 11, n.1, p. 99–107, 2004.

LI, Qiuyu. Film industry research, Chinese mainland and Hong Kong films. In: **2021 3rd International Conference on Literature, Art and Human Development (ICLAHD 2021)**. p. 76-79. Atlantis Press, 2021.

MARTIN, Bronwen; RINGHAM, Felizitas. **Key terms in semiotics**. London; New York: Continuum, 2006.

SU, Lei [苏磊]. 谈刘镇伟喜剧电影的语言共性 [Talking about the linguistic commonality of Jeffrey Lau's comedy films]. **Mangzhong Literature**, n. 02, p. 203–204, 2013.

WANBIQINQIN [菀彼青青]. 《东邪西毒》和《东成西就》: 关于这2部电影，或许你不知道内幕 [Ashes of Time and The Eagle Shooting Heroes: Inside Stories About These Two Films That You May Not Know]. **NetEase [网易]**, 5 nov. 2020. Available in: https://www.163.com/dy/article/FQMCGD0F0528SHS0.html. Access in: 5 may. 2026.

WANG, Xianping [汪献平]. 当代喜剧电影中的"戏仿"：表征与意义 ['Parody' in contemporary comedy cinema: representation and significance]. **Contemporary Cinema**, n. 10, p. 69-73, 2008.

WEI, Junzi [魏君子]. 香港电影史记 **[A history of Hong Kong films]**. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2013.

XU, Gang [徐刚]; HAO, Zhaoshuai [郝朝帅]. "癫狂"的症候与"港味"的踪迹——"北进"及新世纪香港喜剧电影的流变 [The symptoms of "epilepsy" and the traces of "Hong Kong flavour": the flux of Hong Kong comedy cinema in the new century and "northward"]. **Journal of Beijing Film Academy**, n. 03, p. 2–6, 2011.

YANG, Zixuan [杨紫萱]. 近年来中国喜剧电影的互文性表征：阐释与意义 [Intertextual representations of Chinese comedy films in recent years: interpretation and meaning]. **Tribune of Social Sciences**, n. 09, p. 63–72, 2015.

ZHANG, Qiuli [张秋丽]. 黄梅戏《天仙配》的前世与今生 [The past and present life of Huangmei opera's *Fairy Princess*]. **Journal of Chifeng University**, n. 09, p. 59–61, 2023.

ZHANG, Xiuli [张秀丽]. 论黄梅戏《天仙配》唱段《夫妻双双把家还》的风格特点 [On the stylistic characteristics of the sung segment "The couple returns home together" of Huangmei opera's *Fairy Princess*]. **Journal of Chifeng University**, n. 12, p. 222–223, 2016.

Publisher

Federal University of Goiás. School of Music. Graduate Program in Music. Publication in the Portal of Periodicals UFG.

The ideas expressed in this article are the responsibility of their authors, and do not necessarily represent the opinion of the editors or the university.