

The Development of R&B Mandopop from 1980s to 2000s: from Faux-Pastiche, Authentic Representation, to Chinese Cultural Heritage Revival

O Desenvolvimento do R&B Mandopop entre os anos 1980 e 2000: Do Falso Pastiche à Representação Autêntica, ao Renascimento da Herança Cultural Chinesa



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Abstract: The development of Chinese popular music began in the 1920s with the Shanghai *shidaiqu*, characterized by folk-like pentatonic melodies treated with Western Jazz and ballroom dance rhythms. Although the development of Chinese popular songs tends to become more Westernized, local preferences and the efficacy of popular music as a tool in cultural articulation have led to a perpetual shift in musical styles and identity. This article focuses on the impact of the American R&B musical style in the Chinese popular music industry from the early 1980s to the 2000s: from a faux-pastiche R&B mandopop in its initial adaptation to its departure from the stereotypical sentimental Mandopop ballad to becoming more identifiable with Black Music, which later led to a folk revival in the wave of “China Wind” music. This article explores the tensions in this phenomenon as a schism between musical

homogeneity and heterogeneity in the adaptation of Black popular music culture, and the resistance that arises from an underlying long tradition of Confucianism in the genealogy of Chinese music. It concludes with how a retro revival of Chinese traditional music elements, which echoed the early *shidaiqu* phenomenon, resulted in new artists at the vanguard of sustaining and rearticulating traditional musical heritage and identity. Thus, it poses a final question: whether a habitual cyclical return of national identity re-articulation persists at every adaptation of foreign musical trends.

Keywords: Chinese popular music. R&B. Mandopop. East Asia. China Wind

Resumo: O desenvolvimento da música popular chinesa teve início na década de 1920, em Xangai, com o *shidaiqu*, que apresentava melodias pentatônicas semelhantes às músicas folclóricas, tratadas com ritmo de jazz ocidental e dança de salão. Embora o desenvolvimento das canções populares chinesas tenda a se tornar mais ocidentalizado, as preferências locais e a eficácia da música popular como ferramenta de articulação cultural levaram a uma mudança contínua nos estilos e identidades musicais. Este artigo enfoca o impacto do estilo musical do R&B americano na indústria da música popular chinesa, desde o início da década de 1980 até os anos 2000: de um R&B sinizado em forma de faux-pastiche em sua adaptação inicial, passando por um afastamento das baladas sentimentais estereotipadas do Mandopop, até se tornar mais identificável com a música negra, o que posteriormente levou a um renascimento folclórico na onda da música conhecida como “China Wind”. Este artigo discute as tensões desse fenômeno como um cisma entre a homogeneidade e a heterogeneidade musicais na adaptação da cultura musical popular negra, bem como a resistência decorrente de uma longa tradição confuciana subjacente na genealogia da música chinesa. Por fim, conclui analisando como um renascimento retrô dos elementos tradicionais da música chinesa, ecoando o fenômeno inicial do *shidaiqu*, resultou no surgimento de novos artistas na vanguarda da preservação e rearticulação do patrimônio musical

e da identidade tradicional. Assim, propõe-se a seguinte questão final: a reafirmação cíclica da identidade nacional persiste em cada adaptação de tendências musicais estrangeiras.

Palavras-chave: música popular chinesa. R&B. Mandopop. leste asiático. China Wind.

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Introduction

American popular culture, as a global soft power, has influenced the Chinese popular music scene since the formation of the early Shanghai hybridized *shidaiqu* in the 1920s (Jones, 2001; Wong, 2003). *Shidaiqu* fused Chinese pentatonic and folk-like melodies with Tin Pan Alley jazz, Westernized ballroom rhythms, and harmonic progressions. Gradually, the *shidaiqu* phenomenon gained popularity at nightclubs and in film music. Today, its revival is considered an essential cultural emblem, especially among the Chinese minority in countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, where it is performed at musical theatres and gigs (Loo & Loo, 2014). Chinese popular music originated with *shidaiqu*, which evolved from the incorporation of traditional Chinese instruments and folk singing styles into Western jazz and instrumentation. Today, a similar trend can be identified in the Chinese popular music industry, where Western influence is evident in both Mandopop and Cantopop¹.

The continuous development of Mandopop or Mandarin popular music reveals a large market of Mandarin-speaking consumers based in mainland China and Taiwan. Similarly, Cantopop, which is based in Hong Kong, witnessed an expansion of its market after the handover of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China (De Kloet, 2005; De Kloet, 2010; Lee, 1995; Moskowitz, 2009; Steen, 2013; Yang, 2017). Since its origin from *Shidaiqu*, Mandopop has continued as an East-meets-West fusion style—the music's stylistic features have defined the musical taste of listeners in mainland China as well as other Chinese-speaking regions since the mid-1990s (Moskowitz, 2009). Moskowitz identified a few idiosyncrasies of Mandopop musical styles, particularly the romance ballad centered on themes of “loneliness” and “heartbreak,” and a prioritization of *wenrou* (gentleness) over the more varied Western musical styles. Similarly, scholars explored the characteristics of Mandopop that

¹ Mandopop refers to Chinese popular songs sung in Mandarin and marketed primarily in mainland China, Taiwan, and Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. The music industry of Cantopop, which is sung in dialect Cantonese, is primarily located in Hong Kong and is popular among Cantonese speaking communities that include overseas Chinese in countries such as the United States, Malaysia, and Canada.

present themes of nationalism and socialism to express individual expressions with an emphasis on sentimentalism that prioritizes narratives of grief and loneliness (Gold, 1993; Moskowitz, 2009; Steen, 2013), as these songs relate better with listeners—this is explained as “second person authenticity” (Moore, 2002).

Alternatively, as Mandopop developed with pop and rock musical styles in the 1970s and 1990s, Baranovitch (2003) noted that Black music genres, such as hip-hop and rap, reveal another gendered characteristic of Mandopop music. He gave the example of the singer Cheng Lin (程琳) and her song “None of Your Business” (别管我), released in 1995, which contains feminist and anti-patriarchal content. Baranovitch (2003, p. 175) explained that Cheng’s performative hostile character and her intransigence towards patriarchy proselytized the stereotypical Mandopop label of a typical “sweet, soft song” sung by Chinese female singers.

The differing cultural and aesthetic values and appreciation between the East and the West, rooted in a popular Western musical concept, have led to creative outputs that reflect a complex bricolage in the Chinese popular music industry. In the development of Chinese popular music, the perpetual influence of Western popular musical trends has led to constant changes and the emergence of new musical genres, including Black popular musical influences such as R&B, rap, and hip-hop. Although the influence of Black popular music style, particularly the R&B genre, on Chinese popular music has marked a meaningful musical and cultural exchange in the development of the Chinese music industry, there is a lack of research on the significance of its influence and impact on the Chinese music industry. Therefore, in this article, we clarify the timeline and development of the R&B influence in the Chinese popular music industry and discuss why the earlier R&B Mandopop reflects a faux-pastiche and how the involvement of international recording labels in Taiwan marketed David Tao as the pioneer of R&B Mandopop, which led to an identity revival quest in the phenomenon of China Wind music. More importantly, we argue that the phenomenon of localizing American R&B music,

from initial faux-pastiche to a retro revival, is a conflation between the conception of Black music, Western popular culture, and echoes of Confucianism and Chinese musical aesthetic values. We argue that the underlying Confucianist backbone explains the reluctance to depart from stereotypical characteristics such as simplicity, a crooning musical style, and the absence of highly emotional “quiet storm” elements and vocal pyrotechnics. We will discuss how Confucianist principles, particularly *hanxu mei* (含蓄美, “implicit beauty” serve as the theoretical framework supporting our claims, highlighting the cultural frictions that hinder complete adaptation of the R&B musical style.

A Coincidental Reflection of the Past: Echoes of the American R&B Music Hybridity

Growing up listening to American contemporary R&B music, we found that many R&B Mandopop songs lack an authentic Black appeal. We later discovered that early R&B Mandopop music reflects a part of the development of American rhythm and blues, as defined by Maultsby as a “sanitized version” of the genre, which occurred when white musicians produced covers of songs by African Americans during the mid-1950s (Maultsby, 2015, p. 340). The covers marked a remarkable transition from music deeply rooted in Black traditions to a pop-oriented genre that embedded both Black and White musical styles, signaling a departure from the traditional rhythm and blues. The word “sanitized” may be racialized with a condescending trope. Arguably, this deconstruction of Blackness, borrowing the lens of Western musicology theory of authenticity, is an inauthentic departure from the musical zeitgeist of Rhythm and Blues. On the other hand, the act of localizing Rhythm and Blues in the works of non-Black musicians allows for new forms of creativity that, at the same time, reveal a global-local cultural reference in the case of the localized R&B Mandopop; and similarly, in the White producers’ “sanitized version.”

The development of rhythm and blues music itself reflects a perpetual intermixing of musical genres. Thus, the varied definitions of the term by scholars reveal its plurality, fluidity, complexity, and layers of meaning. The term “rhythm and blues” was coined by Jerry Wexler in 1947, which later became popular as R&B (Kallen, 2013). Initially, this term was described as “urbane, rocking, jazz-based music with a heavy and insistent beat” in the United States (Palmer, 1982, p. 146) and represented all marketing records by and for African Americans (Maultsby, 2015), whose musical preferences derived from regions such as the Southwest and the Mississippi Delta (Herrick, 2017; Palmer, 1982). Since the early 1950s, rhythm and blues became a historical turning point as a crossover musical influence. Its development led to a departure from its initially jazz-influenced sound to a more gospel-led tradition, with a growing market among black adults and teenagers alike. For instance, songs by The Dominoes were heavily influenced by the gospel musical style, and Jesse Stone’s songs drew from blues traditions and rumba rhythms in the Deep South musical culture. In addition, as the popularity of Rhythm and Blues grew, although there were adverse claims about the Black music aesthetics and resistance to broadcasting their music on pop radio, White musicians began to cover Rhythm and Blues songs that Maultsby described as “imitative and often sanitized versions” (2015, p. 340). Initially, the ‘crossover’ was criticized by Ward and George as “an aberrant interlude” (Ward, 1998, p. 3) and “a bad omen for the R&B world” (George, 2004, p. 89) for the downplayed Blackness, however, the phenomenon of Rhythm and Blues covers that penetrated the Rock and Roll genre gradually led to increased interest in the original Black music among White young listeners. Hence, collaboration between White and Black producers and songwriters, such as those at Motown, driven by new market potential, led to a musical crossover that features Black qualities, including gospel, jazz, and bebop, with pop-oriented aesthetics that incorporate catchy melodies, string instruments, and softer vocal timbres (McCann, 2020).

Since then, rhythm and blues has morphed into various forms, with names changing from soul to funk, and then to new jack swing, an antecedent of contemporary R&B subgenres between the late 1980s and early 1990s (Henderson, 2003; Norfleet, 2015). Not only was it treated with more improvisational passages on a heavy groove and complexity in rhythmic pattern, but it was also further 'sanitized' by the growing popularity of slower and moderate tempo ballads by both Black and White artists and producers, who continued to devote themselves to their musical preferences with inspiration from the past (Maultsby, 2015). Most scholars use the terms "Rhythm and Blues" (R&B) and "Rhythm and Blues" interchangeably in studies of Black popular music, as R&B evolved from its original aesthetics to a musical form with international appeal. Maultsby (2015, pp. 359–364) employed the term "Rhythm and Blues" to refer to styles from the 1940s onwards and retains the abbreviation "R&B" to refer to pop-oriented Rhythm and Blues music produced since the 1990s.

A review of the literature on American R&B music history revealed its roots in music characteristics and its evolution into more hybrid styles and genres. The perpetual change of musical style led to a reinterpretation of the Black musical tradition in Rhythm and Blues with contemporary fusions and transnational influences such as Swamp pop (Bernard, 1996), Japanese Enka (Sato, 2004), Swedish-language pop (Werner, 2017), and soul-inspired K-pop (Anderson, 2016). In East Asia, the case of R&B Mandopop presents another illustrative example of musical hybridity. However, the adaptation of R&B in Mandopop reflects a complex lattice of cultural and musical aesthetics. In the following section, we discuss how the transnational impact of the R&B genre on Mandopop overlooked a portion of its historical timeline, as well as the cohesion and collision of musical aesthetics that led to contradictory musical features and identity revival in Mandopop. We also argue that the remains of Confucianism's boundedness may be a potential reason for the resistance to attaining a more authentic R&B genre, echoing the phenomenon of White productions of Rhythm and Blues covers in the 1950s.

Echoes of Confucianism: The Conundrum of Faux-Pastiche to David Tao in the Rise of R&B Mandopop

The adaptation of Western musical culture in Asian countries has a long history, stemming from the perception that Western musical output is advanced and modern (Gentz, 2017; Melvin & Cai, 2004). Transnational influence has long been incorporated into the formation of Chinese music, which has localized global elements, especially those from the West. Since the early twentieth century, adapted and borrowed melodies from songs in the United States and Japan had been employed in Chinese school songs (Gild, 1998; Li, 2019) and continual adaptations, such as in jazz harmony and ballroom dance rhythm carried on until the rise of *shidaiqu*, the first commercial Chinese popular music genre (Jones, 2001), and today's Mandopop. In terms of popular music genre, English and Chinese studies confirm the impact of Western music on the Chinese popular music industry and youth culture (Jones, 2001; De Kloet, 2010). Ever since Deng Xiaoping announced China's Open Door Policy in 1978, Chinese popular music has transformed from a musical form as a political propaganda tool to a commercial product (Fung, 2007; Lee, 1995), from "government-initiated and politically motivated activities and genres" to diverse types of Chinese popular music (Yang, 2017, p. 3). Consequently, China became more exposed to overseas technologies, such as cassette players and television, and cultures (Ho, 2006b, p. 444). Hence, the production of Chinese pop songs began to flow between mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. However, triangulating data from the literature with a listening analysis of recordings of R&B Mandopop revealed a complexity due to the level of adaptation and constant changes of musical styles and genres, and it was challenging to trace which Mandopop was the initial representative work of such an initial "hybrid" that adapted the American R&B genre.

Despite a lack of studies with in-depth analysis of how the African-American music styles, such as R&B and hip-hop, were adapted and developed in the Chinese music industry, De Kloet (2010) believed that a significant factor of Western influence was

the import of the Dakou CD that led to the emergence of new music and youth culture². Additionally, an article in the American music magazine *Billboard* reported that the African-American R&B genre began to gain attention in the Chinese market after the mid-1990s, resulting in the birth of R&B Mandopop songwriting (Wong, 1998; Yang, 2019; Zhang, 2010). The R&B genre remained popular from the mid-1990s till 2005 (Jin, 2012), whereas hip-hop gained rapid attention and popularity among contemporary youth since its debut in China in 2000 (De Kloet, 2010). Moreover, unlike the American situation, where the marketing of R&B in the early 1940s gained immediate popularity not only among African-American listeners but also among audiences of other ethnicities, the Chinese consumption of R&B music began four decades later (Jin, 2012).

The entry of R&B music in the Chinese pop music industry, therefore, occurred abruptly, sans a close adaptation following the timeline and historical background of the aesthetical experience of past African-American music genres, such as jump blues, rock and roll, crossovers, soul, and funk that preceded R&B. Thus, this may be a reason why we argue that certain R&B mandopop songs are not authentic in terms of the genre's characteristics. We perceived two reasons: first, the absence of a gradual development in trends following the timeline of American R&B historical development, which may be the main reason of authentic limitations illustrated in the early R&B Cantopop and Mandopop; and second, the tension between maintaining Chinese preferences in musical aesthetic versus the adaptation of the American R&B style, which we argued due to an underlying long tradition of Confucianist cultural and aesthetical influence. Due to this, identifying the representative artists who began adapting the R&B style into Mandopop and the timeline of its development became a complex lattice of musical identities, and in some cases, was labelled as a faux-pastiche.

Contrary to the Chinese music industry's acclaimed godfather of R&B, David Tao, who rose to fame in the 1990s (Zhang, 2010),

² According to De Kloet, Dakou emerged in the mid-1990s when, for political and economic reasons, Western pop music was spread among Chinese musicians and young listeners through "illegally imported CDs punched with a cut" (p. 16).

scholars have traced the origins of Mandopop back to an earlier timeline when it was adapted from the American R&B genre (Jin, 2012; Wong, 2003; Cai, 2013). According to Jin (2012), R&B in Chinese pop music began with producers from Hong Kong and Taiwan, such as Kubert Leung, Andrew Tuason, and Mac Chew in the late 1980s. The representative singers include Sandy Lam, Faye Wong, and Alex To (Cantopop), as well as Harlem Yu (Mandopop), who released popular R&B songs in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Jin (2012) particularly paid tribute to R&B music by the artist Sandy Lam and her 1988 album *City Rhythm*, as well as many other covers of English R&B songs by Faye Wong. Based on our listening analysis, we found traces of R&B influence in the Cantopop of Frances Yip, Teresa Carpio, and Elisa Chan, as described in Wong's study (2003), which noted that their songs were Westernized. For example, Frances Yip's "Love is *Longer than Water*" (情比流水长), released in 1974, reflected an earlier 1940s R&B style, similar to that of Louis Jordan and others. "Love Is Longer Than Water" was a song with backbeats accented by tambourines, riffs by electronic guitars, as well as big band-inspired instrumentation.

Another example is "A Golden Moment" (千金一刻), released in 1982: an R&B rhythm-driven Cantopop featuring clapping backbeats, along with songs by Teresa Carpio, such as "No Longer Frowning" (眉头不再猛皱) in 1981 and the soulful "First of May" (再记起) in 1986. According to CAI (2013), Alex To was among the pioneers of R&B music, with albums such as *Innocent*, released in 1995, which led a breakthrough in the Chinese music industry. However, the genre and style of R&B music were not fully identified in the market as it was still new.

Although scholars have identified that Mandopop and Cantopop began adapting the R&B musical style in the 1970s and 1980s, they revealed that the adaptation primarily occurred at the level of rhythm. Significant R&B vocal features, such as call and response, improvisation, and melisma, were absent in the songs of the 1970s and 1980s, which were sung in the style of conventional Chinese sentimental ballads. Jin (2012) explained that the vocal

features of American R&B were absent in the late 1980s and early 1990s although singers such as Harlem Yu and Alex To presented R&B vocal techniques sparingly with some falsettos, bent notes, embellishments, and belting. However, although Faye Wong was much acclaimed for her vocal skills, especially her covers of English R&B songs, her soft, legato, gentle, and smooth approach contradicts the Black musicality of R&B. Thus, from an auditorily perspective, a strong feature of sentimental Mandopop ballad with delicate and lyrical singing in a quasi-R&B style seemed to suggest a faux-pastiche of the American R&B.

Previous studies reveal that Chinese popular singing style conforms to a theme—the stereotypical idiosyncrasy of slow ballads—where sentimental lyrics about loneliness, longing, sadness, and heartbreak reflect the entangled romance and relationship between two people (Moskowitz, 2009; Steen, 2013). The label of Chinese pop referred to crooning songs with simple melodies and rhythmic patterns, often lacking rhythmic complexity. Thus, we posit that the early adaptation of American R&B into Chinese pop may suggest a forceful conflation. Localizing the American R&B was encumbered by a strong preference for the stereotypical Chinese sentimental ballad. We believe that this particular preference owes much to the underlying historical tradition of Confucianism within Chinese society and can be traced back to the notion of *hanxu mei* (含蓄美, implicit beauty), which is considered a Chinese aesthetic virtue. In a musical context, the complexities of the idea of *hanxu mei* are tied to the long tradition of Confucianist (and Daoist) *zhongyong* (middle way) (Thrasher, 1981, p.25) and the *yuejihe lijishun* (乐极和, 礼极顺, the importance of harmonious music, the importance of peaceful ritual) modality in the records of *Yueji* (Records of Music), which further emphasized the sememe *he* (harmonious and calm) and *shun* (smooth and peaceful) that denote an aesthetical and virtuous importance. In addition, the principle of *dayuebiyi dalibijian* (大乐必易, 大礼必简, music must be easy, ritual must be simple) and *jianjiezhizhiyinzuo erminkangle* (简节之音作, 而民康乐, musical simplicity led to

peaceful and harmonious society) stressed the importance of simplicity in musical composition (Cook, 1995, p.57). Tien (2015) added another level of explanation that the Chinese music aesthetics with the Chinese musical semantic circularity model of four elements: *weiwan* (委婉), *wanzhuan* (婉转), *hanxu* (含蓄), and *wanyue* (婉约) that led to an emphasis on aesthetic balance, simplicity, and quietude. The much-preferred Chinese sentimental ballad has an idiosyncrasy of non-complexity and conforms to Confucianism's conservatism and simplicity, which focus on a "harmonious integration of beauty and kindness" without excessive emotions, based on traditional Chinese aesthetics (Jin, 2011, p. 41). Thus, the "implicit" Chineseness in early R&B Mandopop strongly contradicts the "explicit" Black music style.

At the beginning, the realization of R&B Mandopop musical output has a close relation to a retro revival of Teresa Teng's songs, whose singing was described as "soft, sweet, often whispery and restrained" (Baranovitch, 2003, p. 11) and who had a "slightly tremulous and seductive voice" (Gold, 1993, p.914) perceived by the music industry and market as the "ideal" in *Gangtai* (Hong Kong and Taiwan) popular music during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Baranovitch, 2003, p.11). Chinese R&B songs drew noticeable influence from conventional musical styles, even though they were heavily altered in R&B rhythmic characteristics. It can, nevertheless, be observed that a noticeable step forward was taken in R&B Mandopop, based on Jin's list of Chinese R&B songs, around the mid-1990s. R&B ballads such as *True Love Song* (老实情歌, 1993) by Harlem Yu; *Heart Burns Like Fire* (心焚如火, 1995), *Long for Love* (我渴望爱, 1995), and *June* (六月, 1995) by Johnny Chen; and Alex To's *Go Go Cat* (1994) presented their "bluesy sounds" using jazzy chords (Jin, 2012). Whether Chinese R&B music was inspired by ballads or Black music, it can be seen as a period in which singers from Hong Kong and Taiwan strove to incorporate contemporary R&B sounds and pave the way for future generations. Challenges in adapting to a new genre, with complications of a contradicting 'implicit' Chinese sentimental ballad vocal approach in an explicit R&B context may

be the reasons why the R&B wave did not immediately garner the genre's popularity in the 1970s and 80s, as artists such as Sandy Lam and Alex To did not achieve the same reputation as Taiwanese singer-songwriter David Tao, who was reputed for R&B Mandopop in the late 1990s.

The R&B Mandopop genre was regarded as popular in the industry only in 1997, when David Tao released his self-titled R&B album, *David Tao* (Jiao, 2017). The album landed David Tao, a new singer, with five nominations at the 9th Golden Melody Awards and won him the Best Album Producer and Best New Artist awards. Tao was then officially designated as an R&B singer by the music label EMI (Wong, 1998). During that time, Mark Liu, the director of EMI Taiwan, expressed that "the popularity of domestic R&B is definitely rising" (Wong, 1998, APQ2). Contrary to the previous studies (Wong, 2003; Jin, 2012; Cai, 2013), Hu (2018, p. 73, 96) considers David Tao as the first artist to popularize R&B, including new jack swing and soul Mandopop music, "importing elements of R&B, Rap, and Soul". Similar mentions by others suggested that David Tao is the "Godfather of R&B" in the Mandopop industry (Jin, 2012; Zhang, 2010). Perhaps Tao's R&B was better marketed because Taiwan was well-established as the leading producer of Mandopop, with the support of major international recording labels in the 1990s. Ho (2006a) explained that labels such as Sony, EMI, BMG, Warner, and Polygram produced local Mandopop instead of marketing Western pop music and, consequently, impacted music production in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. With these labels, R&B of Taiwanese Mandopop gradually became a mainstream genre in the Chinese market and gained commercial success in the 1990s (Jin, 2012; Zhang, 2010).

Although academic studies and popular music magazines refer to David Tao as the Godfather of R&B Mandopop, we found that his covers of Teresa Teng's popular songs, which we analyzed as an essential factor in his success, are often overlooked. Hits by Teresa Teng in the 1970s and 1980s, Taiwanese folk songs *Spring Breeze* (望春风), *Fragrance of the Night* (夜来香), and *Moon Represents My*

Heart (月亮代表我的心) were covered and reinterpreted by David Tao, adapting to the musical aesthetic of All-4-One and Boyz II Men in his album *David Tao* (1997), *I'm Ok* (1999), and *Black Tangerine* (2002), respectively. We suspect that listeners' positive reception may be due to their familiarity with Teresa Teng's songs, which relate to theories of familiarity and likeability (North & Hargreaves, 1995; Ward, Goodman, & Irwin, 2014). In addition to familiarity with the beauty of the original melodies from these top hits, their tasteful arrangement in R&B style put the music of Teresa Teng through a retro revival by David Tao, who possessed a unique vocal technique embellishing the pentatonic melodies with heavy melisma and new harmonic progression adapted from American contemporary R&B style, appealing to a new market and trend. Gao (2017) believed that there are three parameters of vocal characteristics that contribute to R&B's appeal to the audience: the rhythm-driven music of hip-hop, soul singing, and a well-controlled vocal display involving the swift transfer of register between high and low pitches. Thus, Tao's performances reveal more Black R&B vocal techniques than those of his predecessors. Jin (2012) described that Teresa Teng's covers by David Tao in the 1990s were rearranged with a strong emphasis on the 2nd and 4th beats performed by drum kick, clap, or snap, which rendered a driving rhythmic pulse and a wider melodic and dynamic range in the style of R&B. Tao's singing style features a richer R&B belting, gliding, falsetto, and embellishment (Jin, 2012; Jiao, 2017), while the melisma and "mixed voice" have close similarities to the American contemporary R&B musical features (Cao, 2015; Chandler, 2014; Zhang, 2010). As such, the influence of Black music styles altered the conventional prosody of lyrics, melodic and harmonic treatment in Mandopop, and is more apparent in the singing of David Tao than in that of his predecessors.

Thus, stating that R&B musical influence began in Mandopop in the late 1990s, as seen in the works of David Tao, may seem apocryphal at first. Still, the intersection and interaction of vocal techniques, musical forms, and styles presented in his songs may

have captured the musical *zeitgeist* of American contemporary R&B music. Furthermore, David Tao's prosody altered the conventional articulation of Chinese words, incorporating more melisma with frequent fluctuations between chest and head voice, including falsetto, which led to a new intonation of a somewhat Westernized Chinese diction. Other singers, such as Jay Chou and Leehom Wang adapted this style. Additionally, when this musical treatment was applied to oldies, such as in Teresa Teng's love ballads, it altered the stylistic presentation of Mandopop. Since then, the notion of Chinese pop as sentimental ballads, where singers were stereotypically labeled as "bardic, sweet, and melodic artists" by scholars such as Matusitz (2009), has been challenged by the release of R&B songs by David Tao. Thus, David Tao was regarded as an "influencer" and predecessor of later artists who challenged the conventional sentimental ballads of the Chinese popular music industry.

Localizing and Re-localizing R&B Mandopop as China Wind Music

Localizing Western elements in Chinese popular music led to tensions in identity and the formation of musical stylistic trends. Previous studies reveal how American R&B music has penetrated the Chinese popular music market, with conflicts between inauthentic adaptation and a preference for stereotypical, sentimental ballads. Following our discussion and labeling of the inauthentic faux-pastiche—the R&B songs of David Tao, which are more musically authentic—the emergence of the China Wind phenomenon marked another cultural revival arising from the production of R&B Mandopop. The China Wind phenomenon was not only a cultural product that opposed capitalist hegemony (Fung, 2006) but also reflected a multidimensional Chineseness in Mandopop (Lin, 2018; Lin, 2019) that led to a revival of ethnic Chinese identity during the 2000s.

The term China Wind in Chinese popular music context, like that of the Korean Wave or *hallyu* (Loo & Loo, 2021), was popularized by another Taiwanese R&B artist Jay Chou in the 2000s, which earned him the title “Father of China Wind” after the release of his song *Niangzi* (娘子) (Chow & De Kloet, 2012; Cao, 2006). Chinese wind music that has incorporated other genres and styles is a well-known phenomenon in the Chinese pop music industry, referred to as “Oriental-flavoured R&B” by TIME magazine (Drake, 2003). Although the definition of China Wind in popular music is complex, influenced by multidimensional perspectives (Chow, 2001; Lin, 2018; Lin, 2019), the phenomenon is not new and reflects the 17th-century Chinoiserie style, which depicted Oriental decoration. Moreover, the China Wind ideology reflects a nostalgic retro revival of the *shidaiqu* concept³. Although Jay Chou explained in an interview with Taiwan’s broadcasting channel TVBS that Fei Yu Ching is the originator of China Wind, it was his R&B Mandopop music that popularized the China Wind concept in the Chinese music industry (TVBS, 2010). Thus, researchers explained China Wind as a “juxtaposition of classical Chinese melodies and/or instruments with trendy global pop styles, particularly R&B and hip-hop” (Chow & De Kloet, 2012, p. 78). Songs produced in the concept of China Wind reveal an audible sonic aesthetic based on the use of traditional Chinese instruments, classical Chinese lyrics, and Chinese cultural visual elements, in the style of R&B, rock, or hip-hop (Lin, 2018; Lin, 2020; Wu, Borgerson & Schroeder, 2013).

Since the R&B wave led by David Tao, Jay Chou became another renowned artist of R&B Mandopop in the 2000s, as described by Fung (2008), he was an R&B singer-songwriter who combined musical styles from the East and the West. Despite China’s political involvement with the popular music industry’s marketing and sales and the tension of Taiwan’s independence movement, the rearticulating identity of “Chineseness” in the artist’s works

³ Although *shidaiqu* is a Westernized musical form in itself, however, as it was a transitional and hybridized form from Chinese folk to Western pop, it was aesthetically “Chinese” to many listeners. Hence, it was regarded as an important cultural emblem, especially in re-articulating the minority Chinese identity, and was frequently performed using Chinese traditional instruments (instead of the original Western instruments) in countries such as Malaysia and Singapore (Loo & Loo, 2014), which reveals the similarity to the context of the China Wind R&B musical style reviving the Chinese identity.

received a strong reception in mainland China, described as “safe, compromising and non-confrontational” (Fung, 2008, p. 79). Jay Chou’s music appeals to the masses through the ingenious hybridity of Chinese elements in Western musical style (Wu, Borgerson & Schroeder, 2013). His tuneful and catchy melodies, in a Western musical form, helped revive Chinese traditional culture (Zhang, 2010). Although China Wind marks a departure from the conventional Chinese sentimental love songs, yet, as Lan (2007) observed, the romantic ballad in the form of R&B, such as Jay Chou’s *Blue and White Porcelain* (青花瓷) released in 2007, became a new style of sentimental ballad in the style of “China Wind R&B”.

Neither returning to the stereotypical, sentimental, and longing Chinese ballad popular in the 1970s and 80s, nor adapting to the quiet storm tradition, Chou revived the musical principles of Confucianism in a new way, blending R&B styles. With singing techniques and styles influenced by American contemporary R&B and hip-hop, the new China Wind R&B ballads were rhythmic and catchy, as opposed to the lingering lyricism of the stereotypical, conventional Chinese sentimental ballads. Jay Chou’s China Wind R&B ballads feature a re-articulation of classical Chinese lyrics, arrangements, and instrumentation. Wu, Borgerson, and Schroeder (2013) highlighted the ethnic significance of Chou’s music by focusing on the song’s use of the Chinese pentatonic style that differs from the commonly used Western diatonic scale. For example, his *Blue and White Porcelain* features a major pentatonic scale, incorporating traditional Chinese instruments such as the *erhu*, *guzheng*, and *dizi*, alongside Western instruments like the electric guitar, strings, drums, and synthesizers. Our audio analysis conforms to the analysis in previous studies where artists in the wave of China Wind favor the use of the Chinese pentatonic scale of five tones: *gōng* (宫), *shāng* (商), *jué* (角), *zh* (徵), and *y* (羽). In addition, the lyrics were written as a pastiche of ancient classical Chinese poetic text, where the expression is reserved and implicit. Although syllabic and rhythmic most of the time, Chou’s singing style is more reserved and decorated with very subtle melisma

when compared to David Tao. In addition, his music videos often portrayed him as a shy character with subtle and implicit expression. The songs were produced alongside music videos that reflected Chinese period mise-en-scène, with storylines of bittersweet reminiscences about past relationships or unrequited love, such as in "*East Wind Breaks*" and "*Far Away*." In summary, the visual and auditory experiences of these contemporary crossover R&B Mandopop songs reflect the four Confucianist characteristics of *weiwan*, *wanzhuan*, *hanxu*, and *wanyue* in a postmodern context. Manufactured and commercialized under a cultural revival trope, this led to Jay Chou's China Wind brand identity.

Studies on China Wind primarily focused on the lyrics and Taiwan-based singers such as Jay Chou, Ken Wu, S.H.E. (Chow & De Kloet, 2012), and other reputable artists who merged contemporary R&B in China Wind is the Chinese-American Wang Leehom, who described his music with the label "Chinked-out". Although the pejorative Chinked-out means hip-hop and R&B music with Chinese identity, the term provoked claims of racial slur and was not well-received in the media (Wang, 2012; Lee, 2012). Small (2009) explained that it is an accurate description of Wang's Chinese hip-hop. Wong (2015, p. 33–34) identified seven primary elements of Chinked-out songs: 1) Rearrangement of classical songs; 2) Dance songs; 3) Preference for the Chinese opera; 4) Chinese literature and tradition elements; 5) Third-person narration; 6) Advocacy of Huaren (Chinese people) pride and justice; and 7) Combination with other genres. Among these, similar to Jay Chou, Wang Leehom fused both Chinese elements and soundscape: Chinese traditional instruments; elements and styles from Chinese ethnic minorities from Yunnan, Tibet, and Mongolia; the Peking opera, and *Kunqu* structured in hip-hop or R&B musical styles (Chen, 2012; Chow & De Kloet, 2012; Lee, 2012; Lin, 2018; Lin, 2020; Wang, 2012; Wong, 2015. Wang (2012) described his musical motifs for producing the award-winning album *Shangri-la* as follows:

Chinese pop music does not have a strong enough sonic identity... Instead of covering or imitating popular songs from other countries, we can focus on developing our own sound, drawing from the rich resources that abound in Chinese culture. Then, I coined the term “chinked-out”.... The term describes an effort to create a sound that is international, and at the same time, Chinese. In this album, I have decided to showcase some of China’s most precious and untapped resources: the music of its “*shao shu min zu*”, or ethnic minorities, focusing on the regions of Yunnan, Shangri-La, Tibet, Xinjiang, and Mongolia. This is NOT one of those “world music” CDs. It’s an R&B/hip-hop album that creates a new vibe the whole world can identify as being Chinese (*Shangri-la*, 2004, Liner notes).

Chen believes that Wang Leehom’s music reveals more explicit Chinese elements rather than a mere Americanized imitation (Chen, 2012). Eminently, the use of traditional musical elements as a musical heritage of an East Asian identity caught the attention of scholars and the music industry.

The songs of Jay Chou and Wang Leehom led to a new approach that somehow re-localized the R&B Mandopop. Apart from the Chinese elements, the singing technique in Mandopop expanded with new styles. Similar to David Tao, Chou’s music, which focused on the groove, rhythmic intensity, and complexity of R&B or hip-hop, reshaped the tempo, rhythm, breathing, articulation, and melisma from soul music, departing from the lyrical style of the sentimental ballad in Mandopop (Gao, 2017). The classical Chinese texts in Chou’s songs were given new prosodic treatment and popularized in the groove of R&B music. However, Wang’s music was seen as a breakthrough in singing, as he combined the melisma of *tuoqiang* from Chinese opera and that of R&B (Lee, 2012; Jiang, 2017; Jin, 2012; Zhang, 2010; Yang, 2019), such as in the song *Mistake in the Flower Fields* (花田错).

The music of the China Wind phenomenon evoked nostalgic memories of the past, with a strong connection to Chinese culture (Lee, 2012; Lin, 2013), once again reviving the tradition of *hanxu mei*. The music of the two representative figures, Jay Chou and Wang Leehom, differs in terms of their application of the heritage elements. The former presented musical, classical Chinese texts, and visual aspects of Chinese culture, whereas the latter adapted musical features based on traditional Chinese melodic treatment and vocalization, as well as musical techniques and styles from Chinese minorities. The R&B songs by Jay Chou and Wang Leehom are never comparable to the complexity of melisma or that of the highly emotional quiet storm songs, such as those by Boyz II Men, Whitney Houston, and Mariah Carey, as they reserve subtlety in Confucianist expression. However, both ameliorate the contradictory issues of R&B adaptation from their predecessors to a new hybridity, a new wave of China Wind music, and the retro-revival of Chinese musical heritage.

Conclusion

As Middleton indicated, “There is no pure popular music; rather, the voice of the people is always plural, hybrid, compromised” (Middleton, 2006, p. 23). Perhaps, the case of what we labelled as “inauthentic faux-pastiche” R&B Mandopop “R&B” music may not be polemical in the quest for musical authenticity. The R&B Mandopop genre reveals an example of a diversified and pluralistic musical style influenced by transnational American music in East Asian regions. Its adaptation of American R&B since the 1980s once again echoes the same way as how Chinese popular music commenced with the *shidaiqu* tradition, where Western musical forms and genres were perceived as a sign of modernity. Although Western popular culture has long dominated global trends and markets with its soft power influencing commercial value, as evident in the popular music industry and other media, the case of R&B Mandopop presents a continuous tension between adaptation and identity revival.

Our analysis of previous studies identified several themes that reflected how a genre such as American R&B was adapted into Mandopop. However, what interests us is the adaptation and development of the R&B Mandopop that evolved in a cyclical retro revival pattern: a faux-pastiche that still maintains a strong underlying style of the much-preferred sentimental romance ballad that resonates the *wenrou* (gentleness) Chinese musical aesthetic and the four elements of *weiwan*, *wanzhuan*, *hanxu*, and *wanyue*, which were deeply influenced by the long tradition of Confucianism. Therefore, the adaptation of R&B musical arrangement based on covers of reputed classic Mandopop songs of Teresa Teng acted as a bridge to new reception, to more authentic R&B musical creations, that led to the emergence of crossovers, the China Wind phenomenon as a revival of the Chinese identity, reflecting a retro revival of the early folk-inspired and Westernized *shidaiqu*—the birth of the Chinese popular music. This raised the question of the significance of ethnic identity in Chinese popular music. Similarly, the wave of China Wind, as a resuscitation of Chinese heritage, has, in some sense, united the diversified musical voices in representing Chinese identity, as problematized by Tuohy (2001). As such, the phenomenon of the localization of American R&B and its development left us to ponder if the transnational impact of Western popular culture in East Asia will eventually lead to a concomitant desire for identity revival, and a stronger re-articulation for cultural heritage. In addition, the results of this study suggest a parallelism in terms of the strong articulation on Confucianism in *hallyu* studies (Loo & Loo, 2021). We were intrigued by the case of the R&B Mandopop and the China Wind that resonates with the ancient philosophy of I-ching in one of its principles, *zhongyinbiyang*, *zhongyangbiyin* (重阴必阳, 重阳必阴), meaning that in the extremity of the yang entity, the yin will begin to rise, and vice versa. Hence, the case of the R&B Mandopop that led to the phenomenon of China Wind—a revival of traditional and ethnic musical elements—posits that a longitudinal submersion in musical homogeneity may evoke the return of musical heterogeneity, and future studies that

involve big data of ethnic popular musical disparities from a global context may perhaps provide answers.

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