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Mallory Carnes April 10, 2018

Creating New Spaces: Constructing and Performing Gender in Mandarin-Language Popular Music of the People's Republic of China, Post-1997

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Abstract

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This thesis explores gender as a primary domain of innovation for artists and audiences of Mandarin-language popular music (Mandopop) in the People's Republic of China (PRC). I examine how PRC-based performers, as they experiment with new gender identities and create new spaces in which to embody these identities, are charting new paths for the once-conservative Chinese music industry. Drawing on interviews with listeners in Shanghai conducted over 15 days of fieldwork during May 2017, I show that PRC-based Mandopop audiences are receptive to artists' experimentations with gender performance, and readily consume music that reflects an increasingly broad spectrum of gender identities. Moving beyond entrenched scholarly debates about Chinese artists' imitations of their counterparts in the United States (Huang 2001), Japan (Otmazgin 2014), Korea (Pease 2009), and Taiwan (Moskowitz 2010), I argue that Mandopop performers in the PRC engage in creativity around gender in order to present themselves to the outside world as modern and cosmopolitan. I begin with a discussion of the various historical and political factors that have shaped understandings of gender in contemporary PRC Mandopop, with particular emphasis on the ways in which the recent economic boom and technological developments have encouraged gendered patterns of consumption. I will also describe and analyze some common gendered terms, such as *lamei*, *ke'ai*, and *wenrou*. In the following chapter, I highlight some of the most influential (and gender-diverse) girl bands and boy bands in the PRC to explore how they innovate with new gender identities. Finally, I present a case study of singer JJ Lin's album *Ta Shuo* to illustrate the ways in which the PRC audience is receptive to artists' individual creativity. The evidence presented in this thesis suggests the need for a reassessment of the concept of individual creativity in Mandopop in the PRC, with the goal of restoring agency to Mandopop artists and consumers who live in dialogue with a society that has moved away from its premodern collectivistic history and entered an era in which individualism is increasingly recognized and valued.

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All My Sincerest Gratitude,

Mallory Carnes

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Introduction

One of Mandopop's most important characteristics is its dual ability to portray past cultural norms and produce new ideals. In the People's Republic of China (PRC),[1] the Mandopop industry has been a key participant in the construction (and deconstruction) of cultural expectations of gender identity by providing PRC artists with an arena within which to be innovative and creative in their gender performativity. Partly due to shifts in gender roles driven by the policies of the PRC government within the last fifty years, the gender norms expressed through the lyrics, performers, clothing, and musical style of Mandopop have changed drastically. After the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power in 1949, many popular musicians fled the PRC because of fears of social and political oppression. From the early 1950s through the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the CCP promoted the idealized image of a highly masculinized and productive factory woman, an image which was based on eliminating defining historical characteristics of femininity drawn primarily from Confucianism. In the period following the Cultural Revolution, however, PRC women have repudiated Cultural Revolution-era masculine ideals and embraced more overtly feminine styles of clothing, makeup, and hair. The PRC has also embraced the principles of capitalism, resulting in a cultural shift toward growing consumption of leisure and luxury goods, including clothing and cosmetics. This is immediately obvious in the Mandopop industry, which allows consumers to express their individual desires through conspicuous consumption of Mandopop that fits their personal tastes. Through this thesis, I will highlight some of the most important transformations in gender

[1] Throughout this thesis, I will refer to China as the People's Republic of China, or the PRC, as it is conclusively recognized as the legitimate governing body of that land area and avoids the connotations associated with the term "Mainland China" (*dalu*) in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other Mandarin-speaking diaspora communities. However, in the case where the author of the original text of a quote uses "China," I will retain their usage. When discussing pre-1949 Chinese history, I will also use "China," since the PRC did not exist until 1949. Throughout this thesis, I will refer to Taiwan as Taiwan and Hong Kong as Hong Kong.

expression in the Mandopop industry brought about by increased access to the internet, the ability to circumvent the Great Firewall of China and access foreign web content, and the capitalist economic boom in the contemporary PRC.

My thesis focuses primarily on the past two decades of Mandopop production and consumption for several reasons. In July of 1997, Hong Kong was officially returned to the PRC after its British colonial rule was ended by the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration. The transfer meant that Hong Kong was recognized as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the PRC, but kept its capitalist economy and was not forced to adopt socialism as practiced in the PRC. Because so much of the PRC's popular music industry moved to Hong Kong and Taiwan during the Socialist era, the return of Hong Kong and the 1992 Consensus with Taiwan meant significant changes for the PRC popular music scene. Another reason for beginning my discussions in 1997 is the significant impact of the Asian Financial Crisis. While the PRC itself did not suffer as much as many other Asian nations during the economic collapse, the impact on the Southeast Asian region was dramatic and caused a lack of demand for products in the PRC. Since the economies of the region are quite interconnected, the Asian Financial Crisis played an important role in shaping the PRC popular culture industry for several years. Finally, I chose to begin my research in 1997 because of the decision made in the Fifteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China to adopt Deng Xiaoping Theory as a guiding economic and cultural ideology in the official party constitution. After Deng's death in February 1997, he and his ideology were praised across the nation and, in the final plenary session of the Fifteenth Congress, Deng Xiaoping Theory and its commitment to reforming State-owned enterprises (SOEs), opening up the economy, and realizing socialist modernization became the PRC's third official ideology as it entered the twenty-first century. Because of the simultaneity of these

dramatic social, political, and economic changes, 1997 and the years following are a critical point from which to begin an analysis of gender performativity and Mandopop in the PRC. I will also specifically focus on the reception of Mandopop in the PRC, since the political circumstances in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Mandarin-speaking diasporic communities have led to different understandings of gender norms in those regions.

This thesis explores gender performativity as a primary domain of innovation for artists and audiences of Mandarin-language popular music (referred to as the genre of Mandopop beginning in the 1980s) in the People's Republic of China (PRC). I examine how PRC-based performers, as they experiment with new gender identities and create new spaces in which to embody these identities, are charting new paths for the once-conservative Chinese music industry. Drawing on interviews with listeners in Shanghai conducted over 15 days of fieldwork during May 2017, I show that PRC-based Mandopop audiences are receptive to artists' experimentations with gender performance, and readily consume music that reflects an increasingly broad spectrum of gender identities. Moving beyond entrenched scholarly debates about Chinese artists' imitations of their counterparts in the United States (Huang 2001), Japan (Otmazgin 2014), Korea (Pease 2009), and Taiwan (Moskowitz 2010), I argue that Mandopop performers in the PRC engage in creativity around gender identity in order to present themselves to the outside world as modern and cosmopolitan.

I begin this thesis by reflecting on the historical and political factors leading to the significant shift in gender representation in Mandopop in the past two decades, which has affected singers, songwriters, lyricists, performers, and audiences alike. This shift occurred because the Mandopop industry felt economic and social pressure, both from within the PRC and from other regions of the Chinese-speaking world such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, to reflect the

changing gender norms ushered in by increased access to foreign media and a booming capitalist economy. Mandopop now presents an increasingly gender-diverse image, wherein being a sexy woman, a tender male, or an androgyne are all frequent performative categories. In Chapter 2, I will discuss this increasingly diverse market for gender performativity through an analysis of the rise of all-girl groups such as FFC-Acrush and SNH48, whose images can defy or support gender norms of clothing but are both still quite successful in the mainstream music industry. Moving beyond the songs themselves, I will also discuss how gender identity is signified through physical appearances of performers. For example, over the past decades, there has been a rising trend in both *ke'ai* (cute) and *lamei* (hot girl) stereotypes for female Mandopop stars, which has been clearly reflected in clothing, makeup, and hairstyles. Finally, this thesis takes as evidence data collected from fieldwork conducted in Shanghai in May 2017, whereby I propose that Mandopop's reimaging of gender norms is also reflected in PRC citizens' understanding of gender norms in larger societal contexts. The third chapter of this thesis will examine the PRC audience's reception of the music of JJ Lin's album *Ta Shuo* (*She Says*) as it relates to the gender pronoun *ta* (he/she/it) in spoken Mandarin, in addition to the complicated issue of gender of performer versus songwriter in this album. By demonstrating that PRC artists and audiences are receptive to Mandopop as a domain for gender creativity, I argue that both parties are increasingly aware and acceptant of new diverse gender identities which are given space for public expression in Mandopop.

The rise of all-girl groups influenced by J-pop and K-pop, changes in acceptable physical appearances of singers, and a case study of JJ Lin's music together reveal the individual creativity which has caused this shift in the contemporary Mandopop scene as it relates to changes in PRC culture, social norms, and gender norms. This necessitates a reevaluation of the

concept of individual creativity in Mandopop in the late capitalist era of the PRC, giving long overdue agency back to Mandopop artists and consumers who live in dialogue with a society which has moved away from its premodern collectivistic history to an era where individualism is increasingly realized.

Methodology

While studying abroad in Beijing in the fall of 2016, my calligraphy teacher, a young woman in her thirties who had spent several years in the US and spoke fluent English, took it upon herself to improve my Chinese listening skills through music. Everyone in the program knew me as the student who was devoted enough to music to bring my instrument across the globe with me, so my calligraphy teacher, also a music enthusiast, attempted to teach me "everything I need to know about Chinese pop music vocabulary" in a semester. She was a huge fan of popular music both in the US and in the PRC, so she introduced me to many Mandopop artists and I introduced her to some of my favorite US groups. One day, however, she played a song for me which changed my entire perspective; that song was JJ Lin's "Ta Shuo," the title track from his eighth album. It fascinated me because the lyrics, which are primarily meant to be heard instead of written down, used the aurally ambiguous gender pronoun *ta* (he/she/it), but by the end of the song, my teacher assured me that any native Chinese-speaking listener would clearly know that the pronoun referred to "she" instead of "he" or "it." I was curious as to how listeners developed this understanding of gender identity, particularly once I knew that the song, whose lyrics were written by the Singaporean star Stephanie Sun, was originally composed by JJ Lin for a female singer, but in this instance, he recorded it himself. Thus, it was not entirely the gender of the singer which determined the perception of the pronoun, but something within the

lyrics or delivery as well. This phenomenon fascinated me and I immediately set out to research the reception of this song in major PRC urban centers such as Beijing and Shanghai.

When I set out to understand the significance of JJ Lin's "Ta Shuo," I also discovered a surprising lack of current English-language scholarship on twenty-first century Mandopop in the People's Republic of China. Mandopop, a term coined in the 1980s to describe a genre of Mandarin-language popular music, is a vibrant transnational industry with cultural and political significance throughout the Chinese-speaking world. Since the industry's inception in 1920s Shanghai, it has grown to encompass an audience of over a billion listeners in the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore.[2] It is an industry which developed in the twentieth century, a time of almost constant political and social upheaval in the PRC. While the contemporary PRC is decades beyond the Cultural Revolution, it is still in the midst of significant economic and political transformations. Mandopop, the popular music written in the nationally sanctioned language of the government, continues to accompany these social changes as the PRC progresses.

Ethnomusicology, as the name suggests, is a field which depends heavily on ethnography as a research method. In order to better understand the public response to Mandopop's shift in gender portrayal, I undertook an ethnographic study in Shanghai in May 2017. While living in Shanghai, the modern cultural center of the PRC and the birthplace and current home of the PRC Mandopop industry, I spent my time visiting locations ranging from tourist destinations to coffee shops to concerts at Shanghai's *Yuyintang*, which is one of the oldest underground live music houses in the city. Before departing for Shanghai, I crafted a list of potential interview questions

[2] Nielsen. 2016. "Untapped Potential? Understanding China's Music Consumers." Last modified April 18, 2016. http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2016/untapped-potential-understanding-chinas-music-consumers.html.

and topics which I hoped to understand for this project.[3] At these locations, I sought to speak with locals in order to gauge their relative understanding of Mandopop. I collectively interviewed fifty-one people, some of whom did not have any interest in Mandopop, but the vast majority of whom listened to Mandopop at least somewhat frequently and could contribute to my understanding of gender performativity in Mandopop. At the beginning of each interaction, I used casual introductory questions (for example, asking if he/she was interested in listening to music) to establish myself as a friendly but curious researcher. One of the biggest challenges that I faced was interviewees' reactions to my ability to speak Mandarin, which is a common reaction in the PRC, but sometimes caused distraction from the focus of my research. After explaining that I was conducting an ethnographic research project related to Chinese popular music, I asked participants for their consent to be interviewed, which was recorded via an approved translated consent form. During the remainder of the interview, which lasted anywhere from five minutes to an hour depending on relative engagement of the subject, I asked more probing questions about JJ Lin, as well as the particular songs or artists that an interviewee enjoyed, followed by questions about the specific gender dynamics of those songs or artists. At the end of my two-week interview period, during which all interviews were recorded via a handheld audio recording device, I spent several weeks transcribing and translating responses in order to analyze the variety of responses recorded. After analysis, I discovered that the body of responses pointed to the PRC audience's positive reception of gender creativity in Mandopop.

In addition to my fieldwork conducted in Shanghai, I also contacted my connections in Beijing at Peking University to ask their opinions of Mandopop. While I did not have the time or financial resources necessary to travel to Beijing for extensive interviews with my former

[3] This list of interview questions can be found in Appendix 2.

professors, conductors, and peers, I did compile an online survey with fifteen items to gauge opinions among those I knew at Peking University. I sent out the survey via the social media platform *Weixin* (more commonly known in the United States as WeChat), the most popular platform in the PRC at the time.[4] The format of this WeChat survey did not allow me to begin a casual conversation with participants and then move deeper into the meanings of Mandopop, but I did attempt to organize my questions from broadest to narrowest to simulate natural conversation. I believe that my prior familiarity with the participants helped to eliminate bias in their responses, since they already knew me personally. However, concern about the monitoring of their responses may have led to caution in speaking freely in relation to sensitive topics.

This method of conducting virtual and face-to-face ethnography allowed me to reach a diverse audience of different ages, genders, social classes, and backgrounds. However, my limited time in Shanghai and initial difficulties finding appropriate ways to conduct interviews in my second language were two of the most significant challenges I encountered during this project. Another limitation to my ethnography is that I am physically identifiable as a cultural outsider, which is immediately obvious to anyone that I approach. I stand out as someone that they can reasonably predict is from the United States, so I am not normally assumed to speak Chinese. Upon discovering that I could speak Mandarin, most interviewees were very excited and eager to help me practice my Chinese by conducting the interviews. However, it was clear that some participants were frustrated if I did not understand the exact meaning of their comments. Fortunately, I was able to revisit any situations where I found myself unclear of an interviewee's meaning because I recorded the interviews. A final limitation in my research is my

[4] This smartphone and computer application has messaging, status update, and connection capabilities similar to Facebook and is a free download. It recently replaced QQ and the previously popular Renren as the hottest communication app in the PRC, as it also includes platforms to listen to music and make payments. However, its contents are monitored by the PRC government.

non-native speaker status as it relates directly to listening to Mandopop. When I listen to JJ Lin's "Ta Shuo," I do not immediately arrive at any sort of understanding of gendered language that a native speaker might automatically project onto the lyrics. Because of this, I cannot offer my personal unbiased opinion on which aspects of a song might contribute to a gendered understanding of it, but I can only make decisions based on the ideas expressed by interviewees.

While this research is in no way a full-scale investigation of the population of the PRC and their responses to Mandopop and gender norms, I believe that I captured a sample of the population which could reasonably address my questions about how gender norms are reinforced, broken, or recreated through Mandopop. I will consider these interviews with PRC citizens about their understanding of gender performativity in Mandopop, as well as previous research done by Mark Moskowitz on gender performativity in Chinese pop music in his book *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow* (2010), as my evidence in this thesis. I will also combine this research with materials drawn from gender studies, economics, and cultural anthropology in order to illuminate the processes occurring in the contemporary PRC that have allowed the field of Mandopop to develop as it has. I will use audio and video recordings of Mandopop performances, as well as artists' social media, fan pages, and advertisements as primary sources in my thesis. For the selected songs and artists discussed within my thesis, I have chosen only those that are popular in the People's Republic of China, since the songs which are popular in Hong Kong or Taiwan are not necessarily representative of the PRC audience's tastes.

Introduction to Mandopop

Mandopop[5] (*huayu liuxing yinyue*) is the term coined around 1980 to describe a genre of Mandarin-language popular music. The origins of the term are closely related to the phenomenon of Cantopop and the same naming trend can be seen within the broader C-pop (Chinese popular music), J-pop (Japanese popular music), and K-pop (Korean popular music). The genre which has evolved into what is known as Mandopop originated in Shanghai in the 1920s, when Standard Mandarin – based on the Beijing dialect – was the language of the modern, educated class of reformers. In an era of significant political movements such as the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement, standardizing language across the entire country was an increasingly important task, thus resulting in popular music which used the government-propagated and public-school-mandated Standard Mandarin. In the 1920s, the "father of Chinese popular music" Li Jinhui began working closely with American jazz artist Buck Clayton. After his daughter recorded the first Chinese popular song "Drizzle" (*Mao Mao Yu*), which combined jazz and Chinese folk music, *shidaiqu* (songs of the time/popular music) rose to importance as a genre which combined Western and Chinese influences and instrumentation.[6] Although it first struggled to overcome traditional associations between entertainers and sexual misconduct in entertainment quarters, *shidaiqu* was eventually adopted by a wider audience and received influence from many additional Western genres.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the genre of *shidaiqu* was firmly established by the group of singers labeled as the "Seven Great Singing Stars" (*Qi Da Gexing*), who were the stars of the film and music industry in Shanghai. During this period, the Republic of China faced significant

[5] Within this thesis, I use the term "Mandopop" to refer to a specific genre of Mandarin-language popular music which derives from the early Shanghai *shidaiqu* era, but does not encompass all popular music written in Mandarin. Furthermore, the term, which was coined in 1980, is not used to refer to music before 1980.
[6] For more information on Li Jinhui, his daughter's recording of "Drizzle," and his involvement in the May Fourth and New Culture Movements, refer to Andrew F. Jones' 2001 *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age*.

external conflict, as well as internal occupation by the Japanese from 1937-1945. In an already chaotic political and social era of reform movements which deemed *shidaiqu* to be a form of pornography, war and occupation were the final blows that persuaded singers to relocate to Hong Kong. This is one of the reasons that comparatively little research exists on pop music of the PRC; since the industry grew into its prime power outside of the PRC, much more scholarship exists focusing on Hong Kong and Taiwan.

From the establishment of the PRC in 1949 throughout the 1950s and 1960s, when the PRC was experiencing the Mao era and the Cultural Revolution, Mandarin-language popular music was safe in Hong Kong. However, the popular music of the West also began to exert a heavier influence on these singers and songwriters and their audiences, resulting in many artists switching to trendier English songs, followed by Cantonese. In Taiwan, with the retreat of the Kuomintang (KMT) after defeat on the PRC by the CCP, the influence of foreign popular music was particularly obvious, as evidenced by the combination of Japanese enka and Taiwanese traditions that are reflected in many Taiwan-based popular songs of the 1950s and 60s. Since the martial law imposed on Taiwan in 1949 restricted language usage to Mandarin and limited Japanese and Hokkien, the development of modern Mandarin-language popular music on Taiwan was actually necessary to continue making music but avoid political consequences.[7]

As the Taiwanese music industry grew during the 1960s, it began to generate a significant amount of revenue, moving Taipei to the center of the Mandarin-language popular music scene. This is due to the rapidly increasing fame of several key Taiwanese film and pop stars, who used their influence over multiple arenas to rise to the top of the charts. One of the most important Mandopop stars of all time, Teresa Teng (*Deng Lijun*), who lived from 1953 to

[7] Mark Moskowitz, *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and Its Cultural Connotations* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 3.

1995, was one of these Taiwan-born singers who stole the hearts of her fans across many languages and cultural boundaries. She rose to fame in the latter half of the 1960s when she won a singing competition and then signed her first major record deal. During the 1970s, she quickly gained popularity in Japan, while still maintaining her status in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Although her music was banned for political reasons in the PRC, the black market allowed her songs to remain popular even across these barriers, thus resulting in the ban being lifted. In 1978, just two years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, PRC leader Deng Xiaoping instituted the open-door policy which allowed products from Hong Kong and Taiwan into the PRC. The Mandarin-language popular music of Hong Kong and Taiwan, known as *gangtai* pop (named for the combination of the two locations, Hong Kong – *Xiang Gang* – and Taiwan), was a huge success within the PRC, as it represented an emotional outlet that was in stark contrast to the revolutionary songs of the Mao era. With the implementation of the open-door policy, the music industry developed more recording locations in major cities such as Shanghai and Beijing. As the PRC entered the 1980s, the Chinese rock industry also emerged, giving further fuel to the music industry stemming from Beijing.

During the 1990s, the male counterpart to the earlier "Seven Great Singing Stars" began to dominate the industry; these four singers, known as the "Four Heavenly Kings" (*Si Da Tianwang*), recorded Cantopop music in Hong Kong, but also added Mandopop to their image to appeal to a larger audience. These four singers – Aaron Kwok (*Guo Fucheng*), Leon Lai (*Li Ming*), Andy Lau (*Liu Dehua*), and Jacky Cheung (*Zhang Xueyou*) – sold millions of albums in the first half of the decade, although they fell out of prominence in the late 90s and the early 2000s. In the 2000s, Mandopop again began to rise in popularity in the PRC, with the increasing number of stars who originated from Shanghai and Beijing. Aided by the rising PRC film

industry and TV drama market, as well as the addition of other alternative music genres, the music industry across the PRC rose in power and revenue, even though the music piracy crisis remained problematic for many artists. More recently, the Mandopop industry's success has increased with the number of singing contests broadcast for millions of viewers on national television. These contests have launched many singers into stardom through portraying them as idols (*ouxiang*), a concept which had earlier roots in Japanese pop music. Many of these contests, such as "The Voice of China" or "Super Girl" have created huge stars, including names such as Chris Lee and Jason Zhang. Contests such as "Super Girl" and its male equivalent "Super Boy" have also inspired the success of girl bands like SNH48 or boy bands like Top Combine. These trends will be discussed further in Chapter 2, as it is clear that they reflect economic, social, and gender norm shifts in the contemporary PRC. Throughout its complicated history, Mandopop has been a tool through which singers and songwriters could express their identities, and although these identities have shifted over time, the Mandopop industry has established itself as a diversifying, but still successful commercial venture with significant social impact.

Literature Review

Though the research on many individual artists in the contemporary PRC, particularly in English, remains slim, there are several works which were critical to my understanding and analysis of the PRC Mandopop industry in recent decades. One of the books which initially piqued my interest in the topic several years ago is Mark Moskowitz's *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow*. Mark Moskowitz, an anthropologist by training, has focused much of his research on the popular culture and gender performativity of the Chinese-speaking portion of Asia. Much of his research focuses on modern Taiwan in particular. In his 2010 monograph *Cries of Joy, Songs of*

Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and its Cultural Connotations, Moskowitz outlines a variety of aspects of gender identity in the Taiwanese Mandopop industry, ranging from the contents of Mandopop lyrics to the gender norms created visually through a singer's performativity and fashion decisions. His writing, based on ethnography conducted in Taiwan and Shanghai, examines the ways in which progressive changes in Taiwanese Mandopop have been transferred to the PRC, focusing on the PRC as an arena subject only to one-way influence; through this lens, Moskowitz gives significant agency to the Mandopop artists of Taiwan's music industry, while reducing PRC consumers to simple absorbers of the gender information fed to them by Taiwan. While I acknowledge that a majority of popular Mandopop artists come from Taiwan and that this has an undeniable impact on their music, I also believe that it is important to consider the particular conditions of the PRC which have allowed Taiwan's Mandopop songs to cross the strait successfully, as well as the conditions which have allowed for the PRC's development of its own Mandopop stars. In addition to addressing these disparities, I also hope to update Moskowitz's research, drawn from prior to 2007, to reflect the further changes that have occurred at a very rapid pace in the past decade in the PRC, and to separate the Taiwanese influence on Mandopop from the "Chinese characteristics" that make understanding the contemporary PRC such a fruitful field of research.

Another important contribution to the field of research on Chinese popular music is Jeroen de Kloet's 2010 *China with a Cut: Globalisation, Urban Youth, and Popular Music*. De Kloet, whose specialty is the cultural impact of globalization in the PRC, provides refreshing insight into the new wave of rock and roll culture in the 1990s. Although his research focuses significantly on Hong Kong, particularly in his other book *Sonic Multiplicities: Hong Kong Pop and the Global Circulation of Sound and Image*, he also makes many valid points about the

Mandopop scene in Beijing and Shanghai based on almost twenty years of field research. Through his writing in *China with a Cut*, he provides a thorough explanation of the foundations of the PRC's commercialization and globalization process as it relates to the 1990s music industry development. His research highlights the importance of music labels in the growth of the 1990s rock resurgence in Beijing, as well as discussing the difficulties in calling something "Chinese pop" or "Chinese rock" in a world where that no longer applies only to the space demarcated by the boundaries of the People's Republic of China. Basing his arguments on his study of the *dakou* generation which used "cut CDs" (CDs which were missing a portion of their outer rims, thus preventing commercial sale) from the West to expand their musical horizons, Jeroen de Kloet asserts that the identity of a Beijing new wave rock fan or musician is one which is "bordering on the permissible"[8] and thus becomes a powerful political statement. De Kloet's analysis of the political, economic, and social factors that influenced the visual and sonic aspects of Chinese rock music developments of the 1990s reflect his impressive grasp of the field, thus forming an important basis for my research.

In addition, one cannot discuss popular music in the PRC without mention of the foundational ideas of Nimrod Baranovitch, the author of *China's New Voices: Popular Music, Ethnicity, Gender, and Politics, 1978-1997*. Baranovitch is a specialist in the politics of popular culture and ethnicity in the PRC at the University of Haifa in Israel, where he was one of the founders of the Chinese language program. While the music discussed in his 2003 book *China's New Voices* predates much of my focus in this thesis, Baranovitch's work provides the necessary foundation for many of the concepts discussed within the project. For example, Baranovitch writes extensively about the importance of technological developments and the transition to a

[8] Jeroen de Kloet, *China with a Cut: Globalisation, Urban Youth, and Popular Music* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 21.

market economy beginning in the 1978 reform period as they impacted Chinese pop and rock music. His research, similar to the work of Jeroen de Kloet, draws on experiences from fieldwork conducted in Beijing, because of its importance in the 1980s and 90s Chinese rock scene, so it is useful for its emphasis on how the cultural, political, and economic particulars of the PRC are demonstrated and reflected in its own music. One of the most important chapters of his book for my research purposes is Chapter 3, "Negotiating Gender in Post-Revolutionary Popular Music Culture: Reconstructing Manhood, Womanhood, and Sexuality." His comprehensive investigation of gender construction in Chinese popular music is insightful and balances discussions of femininity with the masculine counterpart, an important topic which is sometimes overlooked or pushed aside in the field of gender studies.

Another scholar whose work contributes to an understanding of gender performativity in Chinese popular music is Meredith Schweig, whose writings focus on Taiwanese hip-hop and its negotiations of masculinity in modern Taiwanese culture. While the Taiwanese hip-hop scene has obvious differences from the PRC Mandopop scene under investigation in this paper, it is important to note the gender dialogue that exists between Taiwan and the PRC, particularly since the 1992 Consensus (also known as the "One China Consensus"). The influence of Taiwan's cultural changes on the music culture of the PRC remains significant, as Moskowitz corroborates, but it is not a simple one-way exchange. Through her close fieldwork with the rap community in Taiwan, Schweig argues that defining hip-hop as a male field allows the artists involved to create and legitimize new masculinities, as well as empower themselves. Based on an understanding of Taiwanese hip-hop and masculinity, we can clearly see a similar phenomenon in motion for women in contemporary Mandopop. Women have recently begun to empower

themselves as individuals, both through ultra-feminine or sexualized images and through the creation of androgynous groups such as FFC-Acrush.

After careful reading of scholarship ranging from articles specifically focused on one singer to broader books that survey several decades of Mandopop gender performativity across space, it becomes clear that the field of inquiry into the Mandopop industry in the PRC and gender construction is one which needs further expansion and clarification. Most of the existing scholarship focuses either on Taiwan or on an individual singer, but this thesis will provide the information necessary to highlight the particular dynamics of the People's Republic of China which make the Mandopop industry a thriving cultural force in shaping gender identity in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 1: Capitalism in the PRC and its Impact on Performance of Gender

For female Mandopop singers especially, their personal style choices are fodder for public consumption. Singers must constantly work to balance expressing their personal taste, cooperating with their management, and corroborating the expectations of the widespread and increasingly diverse consumers who listen to and watch their performances. When putting their femininity on display for the world to see, however, these singers do not portray a uniform conception of what it means to be a woman. On the contrary, they have begun to employ gender as a domain of individual creativity, where artists can be innovative in their performativity. One byproduct of attempts to experiment with gender performativity while still appealing to audiences is that the Mandopop market has experienced the formation of gender "types": for example, *ke'ai*, *wenrou*, *lamei*, or other less mainstream identities. For singers such as Faye Wong or Joey Yung, a *lamei* identity expressed through revealing clothing is the most marketable, while other singers such as Michelle and Vickie of the duet Kissy choose to portray a *ke'ai* identity to their audience. These different images of femininity are important for the information they provide about which consumers are interested in particular visual and physical expressions of femininity, thus helping us understand the marketability of creative Mandopop images and sounds in the increasingly materialistic PRC of the past two decades.

In this chapter, I will examine the performativity of gender identity as a changing realm of self-expression in the twenty-first century Mandopop industry, beginning with an overview of gender roles throughout the Chinese civilization's long history, as well as during the subsequent modernization process of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. By engaging with several Mandopop stars of the most recent two decades, we will see that the modernization process and conversion of the PRC's economy to a market-based system made room for the creation of

several gender types which express a variety of femininities. First, an analysis of the *lamei* (spicy/hot girl) trend in the appearances of Faye Wong, Jolin Tsai, and Joey Yung demonstrates the PRC's widening acceptance of a woman's physical body as an image that can be publicly viewed, analyzed, and sold for a profit. *Lamei*-performing women frequently wear clothing which to PRC eyes is quite revealing (although potentially less shocking to Western viewers); this brings their physical bodies to the forefront of performances and advertisements. Expressing their individual identity as a sexual being is one of the ways through which these singers gain fame and fans.

Next, through examining the physical appearance of singers Michelle and Vickie of the duet Kissy, I will discuss the rise of *ke'ai* (cute) culture as a result of Japanese cultural influence. When *ke'ai* culture entered the PRC, some singers such as Michelle and Vickie adopted this identity through bright-colored clothing and advertisements with childhood imagery to appeal to the rapidly-expanding market for *ke'ai* products. Their success in marketing this image of femininity reveals that consumers of Mandopop in the PRC have broadened their understanding of femininity to contain both sexy and cute images.

Through an analysis of the influence of the PRC's recent capitalist economic boom and the increase in internet access (and thus foreign media), I will uncover ways in which performing femininity in Mandopop has changed in the past two decades. I will examine these changes in light of the PRC's specific capitalist economic circumstances, intellectual property laws, and internet regulations, particularly changes in access to foreign mass media by circumventing the "Great Firewall of China."

History of Gender Perception and Norms in Traditional China

One of the earliest philosophies that shaped Chinese understanding of gender norms is drawn from the *Yijing* (Book of Changes), written during the Western Zhou period (1000-750 BCE).[9] In the *Yijing*, the terms *yin* and *yang*, visually represented as broken and solid black horizontal lines respectively, were used together to create trigrams (sets of 3 lines stacked on top of each other) that were then employed to make predictions and forecasts for the emperor to make decisions for the empire. These terms, which have since been adopted into English and are familiar to most people as part of the circular black and white *Taijitu* symbol, were later incorporated into fundamental Daoist texts such as the *Dao De Jing*. Attributed to the philosopher Laozi (6th to 5th centuries BCE), one of the members of the Hundred Schools of Thought, the *Dao De Jing* used *yin* and *yang* to discuss the dualities of life seen through pairs of opposite principles like cold and hot, up and down, and most importantly in this discussion, male and female essences. The two were understood as combining to create a whole, thus both male and female essences were necessary and should be balanced. However, the text clearly correlates *yin* (female essence) with passivity in contrast to *yang* (male essence) activity and energy. Starting over two thousand years ago, China established an inherent difference in the attitudes and acceptable roles of male and female through *yin* and *yang*.

Another one of the most obvious and lasting influences on the Chinese perception of gender norms is Confucianism, a philosophy which was established during and immediately after the lifetime of Confucius, although some scholars today still question the existence of such a person. It seems that it is virtually impossible now to engage in dialogue about gender norms in the PRC without discussing Confucian gender construction. One of Laozi's contemporaries, Confucius (551-479 BCE) also lived through the Warring States period and established a

[9] For more information on the *Yijing*, *Dao De Jing*, and *yin/yang*, see Martin Kern's chapter "Early Chinese Literature, Beginnings through Western Han" in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, Volume 1.

philosophy to correct the flaws he saw in the organization of the state through returning to the values of the earlier Zhou dynasty. Confucianism has defined societal discourse about and understanding of gender norms in the Chinese-speaking world for the past two thousand years, establishing the roles of women in relation to men primarily through the Three Obediences and Four Virtues, drawn from the *Yili* (Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial) and the *Zhouli* (Rites of Zhou) respectively. The Three Obediences indicate that a woman should obey her father, husband, and sons (in widowhood). The Four Virtues dictate that women should have wifely virtue, speech, manner, and work. Clearly in these positions, women's behaviors are defined in relation to the world of men, wherein women should be obedient and cautious.

In addition to confining women to monogamy and service to their male counterparts, Confucianism also discussed only the possibility for men to improve themselves. The word used frequently throughout the *Lunyu* (Analects of Confucius) to describe the ideal person is a *junzi*, or gentleman. It was believed that through careful self-cultivation and reflection on their actions, men could improve themselves and prove their innately good human nature. However, women were not included in this category of people who were capable of self-reflection and improving their condition unless it was through the influence of their husbands. Women instead frequently served as distractions and are constantly cited as the reason for the fall of a ruler, particularly if he enjoys too many female dancers. Since Confucianism is based on the principle that properly ordered families lead to properly ordered cities and a properly ordered nation, it follows that this family model of self-cultivating husbands and morally imperfect wives was the expectation across the society, even on the highest government levels.

Traditional Confucian gender roles also placed women firmly within the *nei* (inner) and men in the *wai* (outer) sphere, where women dealt with childcare and running the family while

men engaged in outside business and could be seen (and heard) in public. This established a double standard where polygyny was condoned, and even celebrated, while polyandry was unacceptable. Because women were located within the *nei* world, they were also less likely to achieve any level of education or literacy. However, there are some mentions of women in other early Confucian texts that depict them teaching their sons, who would later become important political figures, in the absence of their husbands who were occupied in the *wai* sphere.[10] It is clear that women played necessary roles in societal development, education of children, and running households, but these roles were viewed as inferior to the contributions of men to society. For women trapped inside, creating meaningful social relationships or friendships with other women was also unlikely, although not completely unheard of later in dynastic history when records of women's correspondence began to appear. Finally, a woman's primary task within her marriage was to provide her husband and his family with a son to continue their lineage. If she was unable to provide a son, a husband could choose a concubine or punish his wife. In addition, daughters were often seen as a financial and material burden to a family, so female infanticide became quite common throughout many periods of history.[11] Through millennia of celebrating concubines and confining women to the domestic sphere, Chinese society established its deeply patriarchal social system.

As patriarchy became more firmly rooted in China, women's positions became increasingly bleak and the unfortunate practice of foot-binding developed into yet another means of keeping women inside the home.[12] Beginning as a child, a woman's feet were forcefully

[10] This is seen clearly in some passages of the *Discourse on the States* (*Guoyu*), such as 5.203-5.205.
[11] For more information on the history of female infanticide in China, see David E. Mungello's *Drowning Girls in China: Female Infanticide since 1650* or the China section of the BBC's Ethics Guide on Female Infanticide (http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/abortion/medical/infanticide_1.shtml).
[12] Some recent scholarship (Bossen and Gates 2017) has suggested that foot binding was a labor decision instead of related to maintaining the patriarchy. This research also expands the women included in foot binding practices

bound into an ideal lotus shape, in the hopes that the bones of her feet would break and reform into a much smaller size. The obvious pain caused by this process was treated as a necessary evil in obtaining a form of feminine beauty which men greatly appreciated as a means of keeping women in the home. For the rest of her life, a woman could not walk without pain, nor could she dream of traveling further than her village area without help from a man. This practice led to countless cases of infections and bleeding, some of which caused death. While foot-binding is obviously an extreme example of the measures taken to keep the patriarchy alive in Chinese history, it was so pervasive in China at the end of the Qing dynasty that it required many years after the first legislation banning it to see the complete end of foot-binding.

Women in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century China

This traditional Confucian gender system, while supposedly rejected in 1911 with the end of China's dynastic system and the establishment of the Republic of China, was not completely eradicated and can still be seen in society today throughout the PRC and much of East Asia. However, China's experiences in the twentieth century led to multiple reassessments of traditional values, with direct impact on gender roles and social structure. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, China witnessed the end of the final dynasty in its history after millennia of dynastic rule, the consequent end of rule by non-Han Chinese "outsiders," and the formation of the Republic of China. With the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911, foot-binding was forbidden, although the practice did not cease immediately; while this was a positive step for women, the Republic also allocated property rights entirely to fathers (a change from previous practice, which simply said that all property belonged to the male's family line

to cite numerous cases in rural China. However, we cannot deny that this practice was exclusively implemented on women and constrained their mobility.

instead of the father specifically), thus indicating that women were not treated equally under the law. Another change as China moved into the 1920s and 1930s was a broader scope of the educational system, which meant that more women began to receive at least basic education, but the overall literacy rate remained very low.

After a decade of warfare (both civil and international), the formation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 was a significant change. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) immediately implemented policies which worked to establish gender equality, such as the 1950 New Marriage Law. This groundbreaking law kept with the CCP's socialist policies of equality for everyone, as it gave women the right to marriage of the partner of their choice (instead of parents selecting a spouse via matchmaker), as well as allowing them to initiate a divorce from their husbands on political (although still not moral or emotional) grounds. In addition, the CCP's leader, Chairman Mao Zedong, made famous the saying "Women can hold up half of the sky" (*Funü neng ding ban bian tian*). This saying figuratively means that women have an equal part to play in society. The goal of establishing female equality in the Socialist Era was not entirely successful, however. Urban women were allowed outside of the house to begin working jobs which were previously designated for only men, but they were also expected to continue their housekeeping and maternal duties on top of this new burden. As they now supposedly constituted half of the labor force, there was strong pressure on women to advance socialist state construction. In the countryside, rural women also faced this dual burden, but in a much different way; rural women had already been involved in agriculture on family farms, since more hands could produce more crops, but starting in the Socialist Era, rural women were celebrated for this

work, which gave men the freedom to leave the fields to work on canal construction and other large state projects.[13]

During the first half of the Socialist Era, women's equality became a more central political topic (albeit with some resistance to discussing the issue from top Party leaders during the Anti-Rightists Campaign of late 1957),[14] but as the PRC entered the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), it became clear that what the PRC government wanted was not empowered women, but simply workers who cared not about their individual identity (including their gender expression) but rather about increasing production. Over the course of a decade, femininity was essentially erased through shifts to male-style clothing (such as Mao suits) and haircuts which were deemed more practical for work environments. Expressed visually through the attire in which women were depicted and praised on the covers of journals such as *Women of New China*, women were constantly reminded of their work role and the goal of improving the socialist state. It became obvious that to be outwardly feminine contrasted state ideology and progress, and thus was scorned.

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 and the beginning of the CCP's economic reform period (*gaige kaifang*) in 1978, the PRC has confronted numerous gender-related challenges as part of its modernization. One of the most important steps in this process for women is the struggle to renegotiate femininity as a meaningful identity. For example, legislation such as the 1980 revision to the 1950 New Marriage Law gave women the right to divorce for any reason (thus causing the divorce rate to skyrocket), but the implementation of the One Child Policy led to another increase in the percentage of abortions of female babies. Still

[13] For more information on rural women in the Socialist Era, see Gail Hershatter's *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past* (2011, University of California Press).
[14] For more information on this topic, see Wang Zheng's "Dilemmas of Inside State Agitators: Chinese State Feminists in 1957" (*The China Quarterly* 188, December 2006).

seen as weak links and financial burdens, female babies who also could not carry on their fathers' lineage were devalued significantly. Now, the PRC population is experiencing the consequences of this policy, which are particularly devastating in rural regions, where in a society that values marriage above almost all other rites of passage, many men find themselves with a bride shortage. In 2015, President Xi Jinping made the important decision to alter the One Child Policy to allow families to have two children, so many remain hopeful that we will soon enter a generation with fewer gender-selective abortions and that eventually this male-female population discrepancy will rebalance itself.

In the past two decades, the PRC has also experienced an increasing influence from foreign cultural forces, particularly from Western nations and other modernized/developed counterparts within Asia, such as Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. With rising foreign pressure to reevaluate women's positions and broader gender and sexuality issues in the context of the twenty-first century, the PRC has experienced dramatic social changes. For example, over my four years of visiting China, I have observed in Beijing, on the Peking University campus, and in Shanghai that it is becoming increasingly common to see teenage and young adult friend groups that combine multiple genders. The social taboo surrounding male and female friends (who are not dating) spending time together in public seems to be fading. While it remains most common to see male-female dating couples in public, it is a crucial step for the current generation to accept friendships across traditional gender divides. Another factor that has recently influenced PRC social conceptions surrounding gender norms is the fashion culture and luxury goods craze which took over popular culture as the PRC's economy experiences a capitalist economic boom. Anyone walking around the streets in the PRC will immediately notice both the large quantity of people riding bicycles and, more interestingly, the large proportion of female bicyclists who are

wearing high heels. This decision, which seems quite counterintuitive for riding a bike around the chaotic streets or college campuses of a crowded city, makes perfect sense in the context of young women who are attempting to reassert their feminine identity. A quick glance at the directory of any shopping center in a major urban area will also reveal designer brands, Western clothing lines, and expensive purses and watches that are advertised as hot trends. In addition, one needs to look no further than the first booth in any (supposedly banned) "fake market" such as Beijing's Silk Market or Pearl Market to find imitation luxury goods which can be bargained down to very low prices. This rise in conspicuous consumption is just one result of the capitalist economic boom in the contemporary PRC. The desire to appear stylish and Western is one way that PRC women are reasserting their femininity. These ideas, which will be discussed further in the body of this chapter, are crucial to understanding the changing performative gender identities of female singers/singing groups and female songwriters in the Mandopop industry of the twenty-first century.

Performance of Femininity: Clothing, Hair, and Make-Up on Display for the World

In a modernizing society which increasingly utilizes mass media to spread video footage or photographs to document and disseminate information about popular culture, female performers and their managers must remain constantly aware of the audience receiving their appearance and must carefully consider the image that they wish to portray. The conscious decision to dress in a particular fashion or to style one's hair in a certain cut reveals to the general public not just a cursory decision, but a statement about femininity, socioeconomic status, and modernity. These style choices are put on display for the public when a woman leaves her house, but in the case of female Mandopop singers, these choices are quite literally broadcast

to international audiences every day. Female performers must walk a fine line between innovation, their personal style, the requirements of their management, and what the audience expects or hopes to see. When a female singer walks onto the stage for a performance or even creates a music video for her latest single, she represents femininity to her listening audience both within the PRC and in the broader Chinese-speaking world via mass mediation. The twentieth-century advent of advanced video recording technology, as well as the popularization of photography and the ability to access the internet quickly and reliably from many locations, allowed these Mandopop singers to reach a broader audience, thus increasing the impact of their visual appearance on consumers of Mandopop. More recently, the rise of fan groups and fan websites has allowed consumers to express their own opinions of a singer's clothing and hairstyle choices, as well as to engage in discussion with a larger community on the topic of a singer's performativity of gender.

In this section, I will discuss factors which have allowed singers to contribute their voices to a national (and in many cases, transnational) dialogue about femininity in the PRC. As artists delve into Mandopop as a domain of their individual creativity, many female artists now express their femininity in a broader collection of categories. I will focus on the presentation of *lamei* (spicy/hot girl), *wenrou* (tender), and *ke'ai* (lovable/cute) gender "types" in order to understand how each category of femininity is created and performed through clothing, hair, and makeup. This discussion will be framed through the lenses of the PRC's recent capitalist boom and through aspects of modernity such as technology and mass mediation. Because dissemination of photographs and videos has become paramount in the music industry's success, I argue that the intentionality of the visual appearance of Mandopop performers is an important contribution to their music and shapes the audience's understanding of the performer's conception of femininity.

The first performativity trend discussed here is that of a *lamei* (spicy/hot girl) persona. While this trend has existed for almost the entirety of Mandarin-language popular music's history, it is important to note that within the past several decades, artists have transformed this image from one which is socially expected and industry-encouraged to one which is an individual choice and represents a conscious decision to express one's femininity as sexy. The notion of *lamei* female performers dates to the beginning of Chinese popular song in Tang dynasty entertainment quarters. As Classical Chinese poetic forms developed, these words began to be set to music as well. Music thus went from instrumental solos or accompaniment for dancers (as recorded in the writings of Confucius) to a much broader scope including singing for entertainment. As the next several dynasties of imperial Chinese history passed, poetry evolved into different metrical patterns, some of which were based on prescribed syllable counts and others which were much freer. This allowed for the composition of a wider variety of tunes to accompany the poetry. In the Tang dynasty, this led to a substantial documented rise in popular music located in urban entertainment quarters.[15] The songs performed in entertainment quarters were derived from Chinese poetry written by men, set to music, and performed by women for a male audience.

As expressed in *An Anthology of Chinese Literature,* "in the eighth century…a new kind of song lyric appeared, which by the tenth century had completely supplanted classical poetry for the lyrics of popular music."[16] This new form of popular music was organized in new ways which allowed it to carry new meanings for its listeners and readers. Owen notes that, "the couplet…was replaced by a more fluid and irregular movement between lines; and that fluidity

[15] Stephen Owen, ed., *An Anthology of Chinese Literature, Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 559.
[16] Ibid.

seemed to listeners and lyricists alike to provide a better medium for the expression of mood and feeling."[17] This switch to emotional expression is a trend which is still quite evident in Mandopop today. The "mood and feeling" that Owen describes was expressed both through the text and through the performance practices associated with *ci* (song lyrics). These songs were,

> often performed by hired women singers at parties, women whose services might be sexual as well as artistic. The themes are primarily the pleasures of the party, love, and images of desire. At the same time, in this earlier period of the song lyric, all the known lyricists are men. Thus we have the peculiar situation of men writing words, often explicitly, in the voices of women, to be sung back to them.[18]

Here, Owen raises several points which are central to our understanding of the evolution of Mandarin-language popular music. First, the intriguing phenomenon of male songwriters and female singers, echoed by Moskowitz, is truly the root of Chinese popular music today. A quick glance through the results of my fieldwork interviews in Shanghai demonstrates that audiences today know not only the singer of a song, but also tend to know the song's lyricist and/or composer. Frequently these are not only different individuals, but are also of different genders (most commonly in the configuration described by Owen and Moskowitz). In addition to these gender differences, Owen makes it clear that the "sexy" role of female popular music performers has been an important aspect since the beginning. The earliest women performing popular songs worked in entertainment quarters (which was common throughout the *shidaiqu* era of the 1930s and even today), and who offered not just their voices but also their bodies as services. Based on an analysis of contemporary video footage and photographs of performers, it is even more

[17] Stephen Owen, ed., *An Anthology of Chinese Literature, Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 559.
[18] Ibid.

evident that this trend of "sexy" women, both inside of and outside of entertainment quarters, is typical of the Mandarin-language popular music industry. Owen's descriptions of the gender, content, and performance contexts of early Chinese popular songs thus translates well onto the 1930s Shanghai *shidaiqu* era and its development into the contemporary Mandopop scene.

One of the first singers that comes to mind when talking about the sexy female appearance which Owen and Moskowitz corroborate is Joey Yung (*Rong Zu'er*), a Hong Kong-born Cantopop and Mandopop star who rose to fame in 1999 and has been popular since for her *lamei* (hot/spicy girl) image.[19] Her more than twenty studio albums include seven which are entirely written in Mandarin, in addition to her numerous performances of theme songs and appearances in commercials and television shows which have been broadcast all over the PRC. She was even invited to record some official songs for the Beijing Olympics in 2008, further increasing her international fame. A quick glance through Joey's public Instagram account, which includes everything from still shots taken in photo shoots to candid photos demonstrates that she is not afraid to wear tight, revealing clothing in addition to more conservative flowing dresses.[20] These images of the sexualized body of Joey Yung, clearly meant for the public eye, include a pose in a dress with a very high slit (November 10) and several pictures in only a sports bra (October 24). In addition, Joey Yung has appeared on the cover of *ELLE Magazine* (October 2017) and the cover of *Cosmopolitan Magazine* (April 2016).

[19] While the specific term *lamei* is only applied to female singers, it is also important to note that male Cantopop and Mandopop stars can present a very sexy image. For example, Aaron Kwak (*Guo Fucheng*), a Hong Kong singer who is one of the "Four Heavenly Kings," commonly presents a sexy masculine image which has been obvious in his advertising materials and billboards.

[20] Joey Yung's Instagram account can be accessed at the following website: https://www.instagram.com/yungchoyee/?hl=en. Recent examples of sexier clothing choices include her posts on October 18, October 31, November 10, and November 13, 2017.

Figure 1. *Above left*, Joey Yung, *Cosmopolitan Magazine* Cover, April 2016; *above right,* Joey Yung, *ELLE Magazine* Cover, November 2017.

Both of these magazine covers (shown above) position her as an object of sexual interest and direct readers' attention to her body. On the cover of *ELLE*, Joey is wearing a midriff-revealing crop-top with a hand on the waistband of her pants and the other hand on her head. She appears to be staring directly at the camera, diverting audience attention away from the background of a lamp and plant and instead onto her bare stomach in the center of the image. On the cover of Cosmopolitan, Joey's midriff is covered, but she is wearing a dress which reveals some cleavage as well as both of her arms and legs. Her leg is crossed over the front of her body while she sits on the stool, thus bringing her bare leg to the forefront. Her hair is also flowing in romantic wisps around her face. These stylized portraits reveal an intentionally sexualized image of Joey Yung that is broadcast not just to the Chinese-speaking public, but to international audiences.

Most notable, however, are the pictures of Joey Yung which she used to promote her 2013 Hong Kong tour. These photos included one of Joey in a tight white crop-top, sitting on the floor with her legs crossed in front of her (shown below in figure 2). She appears to be in the

middle of removing her bright red underwear, which remains barely covered by her legs crossing. This image was ordered to be removed from its position on street billboards because it was distracting for male drivers to see an image of a sexy woman while at the wheel. Other images used to promote the 2013 tour were similarly sexual in nature, but did not go to the same extreme and thus were not removed. These other pictures feature many deep V-neck dresses and sexualized body positions, so we can gather that Joey Yung and her managerial team wanted to promote her as a sexy singer who visually appeals to men.

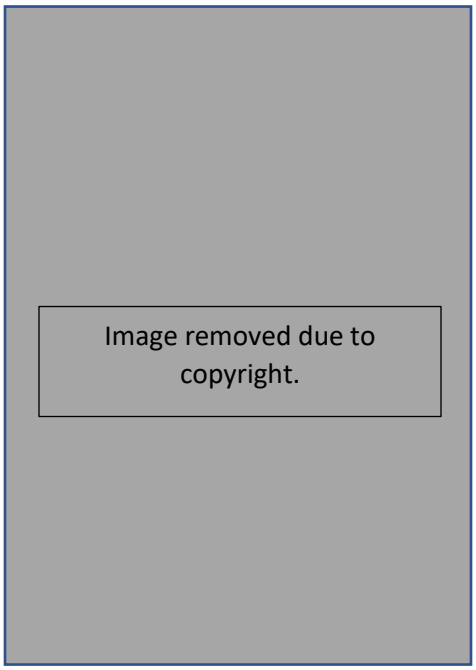

Figure 2. Billboard for Joey Yung's 2013 Hong Kong tour advertising her album *Little Day*.

The plunging necklines of Joey Yung's advertisements only scratch the surface of ways to portray a *lamei* identity in Mandopop. Famous Taiwanese singer Jolin Tsai (*Cai Yilin*), acclaimed across the Chinese-language and English-language internet as one of the sexiest women in Asia, clearly markets herself as a *lamei* singer through her dancing and her involvement with notoriously sexy Western pop stars. Although her singing career began when

she won a singing competition at age 18, she quickly shed her girlish identity for more promiscuous looks starting in the early 2000s.[21] Since most of her albums consist of primarily dance music, her powerful physical movements are an important part of creating this identity. Throughout her career, she has become known for incorporating yoga poses, rhythmic gymnastics, and even pole-dancing into her live performance routines. The obvious sexuality implied through pole-dancing with a male partner on stage, especially while wearing short skirts, midriff-revealing shirts, tight leather clothes, or costumes made of mostly nude fabrics clearly reveals her *lamei* image. She values the pole-dancing as such an important part of her performance that even though she was injured during training on several occasions, she was still determined to continue her tour and include these dance routines.[22]

Her success in portraying a *lamei* femininity is clear after only a quick glance at the list of Taiwanese and international accolades that Tsai has won in the past fifteen years. In 2006, Jolin Tsai was given the Style Award at the MTV Asia Awards, which she attended in a strapless short gray dress and at which she performed in a tightly corseted nude and white dress.[23] In the past ten years, she has also become the first Chinese singer to be invited to such high-profile fashion events as the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show, Met Gala, and the "Big Four" fashion weeks.[24] Her appearance at these events is not a mere coincidence, but instead reveals the international attention that her progressive conception of clothing and the female body have gained her. Perhaps most importantly, Jolin has also appeared on FMH Taiwan's list of the "100

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[21] Mark Moskowitz, *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and Its Cultural Connotations* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 85.
[22] Syahida Kamarudin, "Jolin Tsai Injured During Pole Dancing," Yahoo! Malaysia Entertainment, last modified December 24, 2012, accessed November 30, 2017, https://www.unitedpoleartists.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/jolin-tsai-injured-during-pole-dancing-040500317.html.
[23] "Stars Shine at MTV Asia Awards," Entertainment, CRI English, last modified May 9, 2006, accessed November 29, 2017, http://english.cri.cn/349/2006/05/09/60@86196.htm.
[24] "2007 *shi jiyou* 4 *da shizhuang zhou Cai Yilin fei Milan na da man guan*," Apple Daily Taiwan, last modified February 23, 2017, accessed November 28, 2017, https://tw.appledaily.com/headline/daily/20170223/37561135/.

Sexiest Women in the World" nine times in the past eleven years, ranking first in both 2006 and 2016.[25] Her *lamei* image, broadcast through her dancing, performance attire, social media presence, and daily clothing choices, has marked her as one of the sexiest Taiwanese women of her generation and allowed her to gain success not just in Taiwanese and PRC markets, but also across the globe.

The success of Jolin's identity, however, lies not just with her performances or clothing choices. She also markets herself through writing and translating books and maintaining a nail polish brand. In 2011, Jolin Tsai released her first diet book, *Keep Fit*, whose subject matter inherently brings focus back to the physical body. Her own slim looks and the physical fitness required by her dancing are broadcast to an international audience as an ideal female body. She also helped Madonna translate several of her books from English to Chinese for the Mandarin-speaking world to enjoy; this collaboration with one of her inspirations and a highly renowned Western pop star marks her as a woman whose overt female sexuality in performance has earned her recognition by Western media. Jolin Tsai's *lamei* image has also been commercialized through two different ventures; in the first, she opened a nail polish brand named "Oops! Jealous" with her sister.[26] After its international success in Taiwan, the PRC, and the US, Tsai also launched a clothing and accessories company named "Seventy-Two Changes" which had its base in New York City. Although the clothing line was closed only a few years later, it highlights the importance of Jolin Tsai's visual appearance in marketing her music. Combining

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[25] "*Cai Yilin zhongjie guo xue fu san lian guan deng bai da meinü bangshou*," Sina Weibo, last modified June 8, 2016, accessed November 28, 2017, http://eladies.sina.com.cn/news/star/2016-06-08/1055/doc-ifxsvenx3639909.shtml.

[26] "*Mingren de dian/*Oops!J/*Cai Yilin zhijia caihui jinjun quchenshi!,*" Yahoo! News, November 10, 2011, https://tw.news.yahoo.com/blogs/topic/%E5%90%8D%E4%BA%BA%E7%9A%84%E5%BA%97-oops-j-%E8%94%A1%E4%BE%9D%E6%9E%97%E6%8C%87%E7%94%B2%E5%BD%A9%E7%B9%AA%E9%80%B2%E8%BB%8D%E5%B1%88%E8%87%A3%E6%B0%8F-085751315.html.

the effects of her performance attire, daily clothing, dance routines, and non-musical ventures, it is clear that Jolin Tsai consciously presents herself as a sexy performer.

Another singer who deserves mention in the category of *lamei* is Faye Wong (*Wang Fei*), a Mandopop singer born in Beijing in 1969. Early in her career, she also sang Cantopop, but has since switched to mostly Mandarin, her native language. Faye Wong is hugely popular both inside of the Chinese-speaking community and around the world, particularly for her appearance in the films *Chungking Express* (1996) and *2046* (2005). Faye Wong's image has changed repeatedly throughout her career, demonstrating her ability to switch seemingly effortlessly between *lamei*, *ke'ai*, and even a rebellious appearance.[27] She is commonly referred to as a "diva" (*tianhou*) in Chinese and has been characterized by Jeroen de Kloet as a "singer, actress, mother, celebrity, royalty, sex symbol, and diva all at the same time."[28] Through her early career in Hong Kong, Wong frequently faced setbacks because Hong Kong residents deemed her music and style to be "backwards."[29] While a detailed description of the sociopolitical and economic differences between the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan is not within the scope of this project, it is important to note that Hong Kong and Taiwan are viewed as more progressive in their political and social ideals. After navigating setbacks based on PRC stereotypes, Faye Wong established herself as a hugely popular singer both in Hong Kong and the PRC.[30] She has recorded several songs that have also been spread widely in cover versions by artists such as Jay Chou. Wong's songs have clearly been an important part of her public image, but her personal life has also

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[27] Mark Moskowitz, *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and Its Cultural Connotations* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 85.
[28] Edward Davis, ed., *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture* (London: Routledge, 2003), 659-660.
[29] In the 1980s and 1990s in particular, residents of Hong Kong often perceived PRC culture and society as "backwards" in contrast to Hong Kong's more modern and Western society. Because Faye Wong's name immediately identified her as a PRC artist, she was even asked to change her stage name. For more information on this issue, see http://ent.sina.com.cn/y/2010-08-12/18043050020.shtml.
[30] Mark Moskowitz, *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and Its Cultural Connotations* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 6.

played a significant role. Because of the increasing usership of social media to create fan pages (Wong's fans call themselves "Fayenatics") and the discovery of her personal blog, her image has been spread largely through her personal life. She has been married twice and has been in several other relationships, which have all piqued audience interests. As seems to be a cross-cultural norm, audiences find stars to be most exciting when they experience drama or remove themselves from the public eye entirely; Faye Wong has done both, through her marital life and through taking a several-year performance hiatus from 2005-2009, when she finally reappeared in a shampoo commercial. It was not until 2010 that she began another tour, which was again hugely successful, with showings that sold out almost immediately. While she was on hiatus, many fans maintained an interest in her personal life. One of the most notable ways in which social media expressed her fans' impressions of Wong was through awarding her the 2008 PETA award for "Asia's sexiest vegetarian woman;" Faye was again nominated for this award in 2010 and won it again in 2011.[31] Clearly Faye is seen as a sexual presence, because her unique Beijing background, removal from the public eye, and even her unusual lifestyle as a vegetarian are appealing to audiences who see her through the lens of social media.

On the other hand, Faye Wong has also been described as adding a rebellious image to the sexual appeal she seems to have for so many fans. One of the reasons for this so-called rebellious image is her connection to the Beijing circle of rock musicians.[32] Beginning in the 1980s, Beijing-area musicians such as Cui Jian took inspiration from Western groups such as The Beatles and The Rolling Stones as a result of the PRC's reform and opening policy. Faye Wong's early life in Beijing gave her important connections to some of the rock artists active in

[31] PETA. "Meet the 2011 Sexiest Vegetarian Celebrity Winners!," PETA Asia, August 26, 2011, https://www.petaasia.com/news/meet-the-2011-sexiest-vegetarian-celebrity-winners/.
[32] Mark Moskowitz, *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and Its Cultural Connotations* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 5.

the capital city, which she continued to maintain throughout the 1990s into the 2000s through collaborations such as the album *Faye Wong* in which she worked with artists such as the Taiwanese Wu Bai. Faye Wong also had a relationship with famous rock artist Dou Wei of the group "Black Panther," whom she married and with whom she had a child, although they later ended their marriage. In addition to her ties to rock, a genre already known for pushing boundaries and rebelling in the PRC because of its connections with the 1989 student democracy movement, Wong also created several songs and albums in alternative styles. Her 1993 album *100,000 Whys* is a notable example of alternative music, as well as her Cantonese album *Di-Dar* (1995) that featured Indian and Middle Eastern influences. Faye Wong's unique combination of these different genres made her an impressive artist; people were attracted to her because she was complicated and thus intriguing. Because of this, I believe that her rebellious image made her more desirable and thus magnified the effects of her sexy physical image. In a capitalist economy where buyers have power, consumers of Faye Wong's image are not just purchasing tickets to concerts and recordings to support her music, but to support her image, so her performativity of gender becomes increasingly important.

Faye Wong's popularity in the PRC clearly stems at least partially from her Beijing heritage, but her time spent in Hong Kong also reveals the importance of Western influence in Hong Kong and Taiwan; through *gangtai* pop and other cultural means, this influence is now being transferred to the PRC, beginning after the 1997 return of Hong Kong to the PRC. In the past two decades, these influences have manifested in economic, social, and political changes, although the PRC has adapted these cultural changes to fit the characteristics of life in the PRC as well. One of the most immediately evident phenomena which was transferred through music

is the concept of *wenrou* (tender) identities for performers.[33] Moskowitz discusses this identity in great length in his book *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and its Cultural Connotations* (2010). However, he focuses specifically on the Taiwanese origins of the trend and emphasizes that the PRC received this influence directly from Taiwan and incorporated it; I argue that while the original impetus did undeniably come from Taiwan, the PRC Mandopop industry has adopted the trend to fit the particular needs and desires of PRC listeners.

Another significant gender "type" for female performers in the Mandopop industry in the PRC is that of *ke'ai* (cute/loveable), which is a direct import from Japan's *kawaii* culture. The trend, which is a social culture spread by things which are classified as "the playful, the girlish, the infantilized, and the inevitably sexualized,"[34] was originally derived from *The Tale of Genji* and rose in popularity in Japan in the 1970s alongside cute handwriting trends. *Kawaii* culture more famously led to the creation of Hello Kitty, the "ultimate symbol of cute femininity in Asia and elsewhere," which has since become an international success.[35] The Japanese origins of these trends and merchandise have now spread beyond their original native target audience, first to the Taiwanese culture, followed by Singapore and other areas of Asia and the world. The target audience, originally 15- to 18-year-old girls, has also broadened to include some men and many other age ranges. For singers with target audiences who fall primarily into the original range of *kawaii*, it is obvious why they desire to spread this cuteness through their personal image. The trend of *kawaii* spread to the PRC rapidly through the increasing presence of the

[33] One of the most important aspects of a *wenrou* identity is that it can, as of recently, apply to both a male and a female performer. This indicates the new level of flexibility both in defining contemporary femininity and masculinity which originated from Western influences in Taiwan and has now spread to the PRC. The concept of *wenrou* performance will be discussed much further in Chapter 2, when the significance of the boy band and girl band trends of the 2000s and 2010s will be elaborated upon further.

[34] Christine R. Yano, "Wink on Pink: Interpreting Japanese Cute as It Grabs the Global Headlines," *Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no. 3 (August 2009): 682.

[35] Ibid, 688.

internet and its ability to broadcast information quickly between fan groups and desiring consumers. Because cute items and images have become commercially successful, it is also important to note that they are likely to continue through the capitalist economic boom in the contemporary PRC. From my own experience, the *kawaii* trend is clearly present and resilient; even walking down the streets of Beijing, one is likely to spot grown adult men wearing cute Despicable Me minion sweatshirts, the ever-popular fuzzy rabbit keychains hanging on backpacks and purses, or dollar-store-esque retailers such as Miniso[36] marketing stuffed animals in the front windows. Mandopop producers and managers have without a doubt picked up on the increasing market value of *ke'ai* imagery, and thus many female Mandopop singers have branded their personal clothing and performance styles with this *ke'ai* identity.

One of the most popular examples of *ke'ai* Mandopop comes from the duo singing group Kissy, made up of the singers Michelle (*Mixue*) and Vickie (*Weiqi*). The two singers, not related to each other and born seven years apart, began working together in 2003 creating songs and music videos which are now broadcast across Taiwan, the PRC, and the world via their YouTube channel, iTunes account, and other digital mass media. One of the most striking aspects of their visual performance is that they are always pictured with objects that remind viewers of childhood and cuteness. The two women both wear clothing which covers the most revealing aspects of their bodies, although we must admit that they are not wearing clothing that is appropriate for young children. However, their appearance is reminiscent of childhood and youth because of the bright colors and less revealing styles. In addition, their music videos and advertisements frequently include lollipops, bubble letters, bright colors, and hearts. These images all remind

[36] Miniso is a Japanese convenience store that has successfully entered the PRC market and can be seen in many branches across every major city in the PRC. Miniso is an important site for spreading the *kawaii* culture of Japan to PRC consumers.

viewers instantly of childhood and the popularity of Kissy is thus an indicator of the positive outlook on youthfulness in the Mandarin-speaking world. The two women are also frequently pictured in close proximity to each other, such as leaning back-to-back or both leaning on the same object. Their constant smiles and close proximity remind viewers that they are friends and have a young spirit. This image is particularly important for Kissy because it has allowed their music to become increasingly popular as they provide comfort to fans and remind people of their carefree past. Their bright colors, candy, cute hairstyles, and lack of outward rebellion makes Michelle and Vickie perfect examples of the increasing interest in *kawaii* culture outside of Japan and Taiwan. This is even more obvious to consumers in the West, since even the *lamei* images of the previously discussed artists seem to pale in comparison to the typical clothing and advertisements used in the United States. Adults in the West are expected to present themselves as grown and professional, in contrast to the cute image which is acceptable and even desirable in pop stars in the PRC.

Image and Economics: The Impact of Capitalism on Mandopop

The above analysis of various Mandopop stars serves to demonstrate collectively the impact of the past two decades of economic boom that have drastically reshaped the PRC consumer culture. As the PRC opened itself up to the West and to capitalism, consumer culture significantly altered the way that women were viewed within society. In the contemporary PRC, women have a large portion of the consumption power, which is particularly obvious through statistics that reveal that women are in charge of groceries and clothes shopping in the vast majority of PRC households.[37] According to these surveys, however, they still consult their

[37] Tu Lei, "The Rise of Female Consumerism," China Daily, August 6, 2007, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2007-08/06/content_6012951.htm.

husbands (or another male figure in the household) regarding major large purchases. Since both males and females consume Mandopop for different reasons, we can use the lens of economic consumer power to understand the importance of the trends of *lamei*, *ke'ai*, and *wenrou* identities which Mandopop singers broadcast to their audiences.

The *lamei* identity, although it still pales in comparison to the sexy attire and imagery portrayed by Western pop stars such as Miley Cyrus or Mariah Carey, has become increasingly marketable in the PRC in recent years. The power of the sexual presentation of one's body is reflected clearly in the expression "sex sells," which is a central maxim of consumer culture, in which consumers can use their consumer power to recognize their favorite singers by purchasing tickets to their tours, buying their music online, or buying merchandise to support the singer. The individual power to express personal likes and dislikes via consumerism is one important aspect of individualism which has developed in the PRC through capitalism. This is also discussed by Forbes contributing author Frank Lavin, the CEO of Export Now (the largest international firm in PRC e-commerce), who previously served as an ambassador to Singapore and an undersecretary in the US Department of Commerce. In his article "4 Factors That Are Driving China's Consumer Surge," he cited "consumerism as freedom" as the primary reason for the appeal of consumerism in the PRC's capitalist economy[38]. He writes that consumption "allows you to explore the world through its products, to experiment with lifestyle choices, and to do so safely and anonymously."[39] This is particularly relevant to consumers in the PRC, especially the younger generations, who are exposed to new vocabulary to describe previously unwelcome or ignored gender identities and sexual orientations. Consuming popular music which represents

[38] Frank Lavin, "4 Factors that are Driving China's Consumer Surge," Forbes, December 6, 2016, https://www.forbes.com/sites/franklavin/2016/12/06/4-factors-that-are-driving-chinas-consumer-surge/#2d0c483537e7.
[39] Ibid.

new gender "types" or ideals is one way for these consumers to explore their own values and experiment with their identity.

This consumer culture that has developed in the twenty-first century PRC is also marked by the mentality that "consumerism is a statement of success."[40] Lavin writes about American economist Thorstein Veblen's notion of "conspicuous consumption" that understands economic decisions as "statements of personal identity."[41] His list of "simple pleasures" includes smartphones and apparel, but he fails to mention the importance of popular music such as Mandopop in this category as well. It is clear that consumable items such as a singer's merchandise, concert tickets, or recorded albums are also purchased with the same disposable income that one might use to buy a pair of headphones or shoes, so we can extend his appraisal of these decisions as statements of personal identity to include which artists a consumer spends money on. This is an increasingly important aspect of the market that Mandopop artists and managers must keep in mind as they consider how to brand a singer to appeal to consumers seeking to make a statement of personal identity. In some cases, consumers might be more interested in making a statement of personal identity that blends with the crowd – in other words, they would support the artists who follow gender norms and are popular among the consumer's peers – while some are more interested in standing out through consuming alternative music genres or images.

Overall, it is necessary for a Mandopop singer to carefully craft an identity, whether that be *lamei*, *ke'ai*, *wenrou*, or some combination of these images, in order to market themselves to

[40] Frank Lavin, "4 Factors that are Driving China's Consumer Surge," Forbes, December 6, 2016, https://www.forbes.com/sites/franklavin/2016/12/06/4-factors-that-are-driving-chinas-consumer-surge/#2d0c483537e7.
[41] Ibid.

the PRC audience whose growing consumer power has made expressions of self-identity a foregrounded issue in the past quarter of a century.

Consumption of Mandopop and the Impact of the Internet

During the PRC's transition to the age of the internet, intellectual property laws have often failed to keep up with increasing numbers of piracy cases. As has been discussed on platforms ranging from the *New York Times*[42] to the popular Chinese-language blogging site *Weibo*, CD and audio/video pirating is a pervasive problem with origins tracing back to before the rise of the internet, but which have only been strengthened with the increasing access to free, readily available sources online.[43] Some estimates even place the piracy rate in the PRC approaching 100%, obviously indicating a huge economic and political problem for the music recording industry and the central government, respectively. The PRC music industry has certainly felt the effects of this piracy problem, as managers now seem to agree that the recording industry is not a highly lucrative path; instead, singers must present themselves as the product for consumption as opposed to their music. This has led to the rise of multi-day music festivals such as the Shanghai Strawberry Festival, where singers can make a profit through ticket revenues instead of album sales and has highlighted the importance of tour sales for pop stars.

While the increase in piracy, aided by access to downloading video and audio content from the internet, has been an obstacle for Mandopop performers, the internet has also provided

[42] Sabra Chartrand, "Stepping Up the Pressure Against Piracy in China," New York Times, December 6, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/06/business/businessspecial2/stepping-up-the-pressure-against-piracy-in-china.html.
[43] Mark Moskowitz, *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and Its Cultural Connotations* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 7.

quick ways for artists to market themselves to a huge audience. Through social media apps such as Renren, QQ, and WeChat, which have all experienced seasons of popularity in the past decade, singers can market their images on personal accounts, as well as fan pages. Singers can also use QQ Music, which is now linked through WeChat, to advertise and market their songs. The size of the consuming audience on WeChat has significant potential for singers to gain fans, but government censorship of WeChat content means that singers are limited in the identities that they can portray and the comments they can make.

However, in the past five years alone, technological capabilities to bypass the so-called "Great Firewall of China" have allowed singers to broadcast aspects of their image around the globe to a non-Chinese speaking audience and to a Chinese-speaking audience in diaspora.[44] This is not to say that these artists are now entirely free to express their thoughts, though, as even Taiwanese Mandopop stars who have the protection of government free speech laws still censor their speech by omission. The complicated relationship of artists with their respective governments is one which has significant ramifications within this thesis, particularly for artists who wish to experiment with new gender expressions. With the rise of VPN technology, PRC internet users can now access music via iTunes, Spotify, or YouTube. This has allowed for more multi-directionality and porosity in communication, as PRC consumers now have access to the music of artists based in Hong Kong or Taiwan to which they might not have previously had access. This is also a two-way exchange process, in that Mandopop artists can receive influence from their Western pop music counterparts as well. For example, Jolin Tsai cites Madonna, Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston, and Janet Jackson as some of her heroes. The influence of Western pop singers' sexual or powerful femininity on Jolin Tsai is obvious in her *lamei* identity

[44] The "Great Firewall of China" is the colloquial term for the set of firewalls that the PRC government developed to block users from accessing sites such as Google, Facebook, Snapchat, and other news and social media sources.

which is a big departure from the societal expectations of Taiwanese females. Because of the two-way dialogue about what it means to be a woman in music allowed by recent technological developments and social media platforms, Mandopop singers have begun to express their new identities such as *lamei* or *ke'ai* to a broader audience of consumers.

The Mandpop industry has also experienced the rise of a pervasive fan culture, as previously mentioned in relation to Faye Wong's "Fayenatics." Because of the market-oriented economy, the PRC's fan culture has led to a fan economy, fan industry, and even professional fans. Countless websites and blogs in both English and Chinese exist with the sole purpose of spreading information about a singer's every movement. These fan groups represent themselves in large numbers at every tour performance and sometimes require fans to show proof of purchase for a singer's latest album or merchandise to show that they are legitimate fans. Clearly a demonstration of both consumer socioeconomic status and leisure time, Mandopop fan culture is one more manifestation of the PRC's capitalist economic boom and its impact on Mandopop.[45]

Conclusions

After a long history of patriarchal dominance in China, women have recently begun to experience increasing freedom to experiment with definitions of femininity outside of the previously established gender norms of Confucian China. Since the beginning of the 1978 reform and opening policy change, the PRC has undergone a culture shift which advocates individualism and personal expression through consumerism and materialism. This is directly represented through the female singers of the Mandopop industry, who now choose to portray

[45] For further reading on fan culture in Mandopop, see Shuyu Kong's "The 'Affective Alliance': 'Undercover,' Internet Media Fandom, and the Sociality of Cultural Consumption in Postsocialist China" in *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 24 (Spring 2012) or Eva Tsai's "Existing in the Age of Innocence: Pop Stars, Publics, and Politics in Asia" in *East Asian Pop Culture* (Hong Kong University Press, 2008).

themselves in a widening variety of gender "types," ranging from cute to sexy to androgynous. While Mandopop artists are certainly exercising their creativity with regards to gender identity, they are still operating within somewhat less flexible social contexts. Their situation is not new, however, as the contemporary female Mandopop artists who are flirting with expanding societal gender norms have precedents reaching back to early twentieth century Shanghai. In the era of *shidaiqu*, 1930s Chinese women also attempted to navigate colonial modernity, strategies for portraying the self, and tensions between traditionally Chinese and Western concepts of gender. With the addition of navigating individual identity and capitalism, this list of concerns remains similar as women in the PRC today attempt to sound their identities.

In addition to navigating these questions of self-identity, PRC Mandopop artists must also market their image successfully in a culture where piracy renders selling music ineffective; these women have demonstrated their command of the market through selling merchandise, organizing tours, and performing their feminine identity for the world on social media. In the future, I believe we can expect even broader conceptions of femininity that cross gender boundaries as PRC society and the Mandarin language expand to include discourse about the fluidities of gender and sexual orientation. As the internet and social media apps such as WeChat sweep across the PRC, the importance of Mandopop singers in reflecting the gender norms which audiences expect to see or challenging these norms (as Jolin Tsai has already started to do through her associations with the LGBTQ+ communities in Asia[46]) will continue to shape PRC perceptions of femininity in a modernizing world.

[46] Tamar Herman, "C-Pop Star Jolin Tsai on LGBTQ+ Representation in Her Music: 'I Am Just Following My Heart'," Billboard, June 28, 2017, https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/pride/7849254/jolin-tsai-on-lgbtq-representation-in-her-music.

Chapter 2: Girl Bands and Boy Bands – Gendered Groups in Mandopop

In the twenty-first century PRC, one of the most noticeable and noteworthy societal changes is the increasing power of foreign influence on popular culture, which is particularly obvious in the realm of popular music. After the late-twentieth-century rise of boy bands, there has come an equally (if not more) powerful wave of girl bands sweeping across the country and throughout the Chinese-speaking world. The main sources of influence for these groups are the K-Pop and J-Pop industries, which have hundreds of girl groups spanning from at least the 1990s, but with a substantial resurgence in the second decade of the twenty-first century.[47] While Chinese girl bands such as the androgynous FFC-Acrush might visually bear quite little resemblance to the cute and "girly" image of the more than one hundred members of SNH48, both provide a helpful lens for an examination of femininity in Chinese popular music. These two groups collectively tell the stories of a diverse group of women who are navigating femininity in the contemporary PRC, representing to their listeners and to the world that their understanding of femininity is shifting and broadening. The rise in cross-dressing on one hand demonstrates the wider acceptance of androgyny and on the other hand the continued dominance of masculinity. However, the female idol concept created and broadcast through groups such as SNH48, a direct offshoot of the Japanese group AKB48, is a clear statement that effeminate identities can also be lucrative and powerful.

In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which foreign influence on Mandopop girl bands has changed in the twenty-first century, as well as the effects of these shifts on society through the media. A discussion of FFC-Acrush and androgyny will highlight the broadening boundaries for women who identify as female, or who choose to identify with a gender-neutral

[47] Current examples of girl bands in the J-Pop industry include AKB48, E-Girls, and Babymetal. K-Pop examples include Apink and Wonder Girls.

term instead, but choose to dress and style their hair in traditionally masculine ways. As these women are allowed into the media and onto concert stages, they continue to propagate their message not only to an urban audience, but also to more traditionally conservative parts of the Chinese-speaking world. On the other hand, girl bands such as SNH48 and its many associated acts (BEJ48, GNZ48, etc.) demonstrate the multiplicity of cute, sexy, and powerful ways to be effeminate in the contemporary PRC. As these groups and others continue to push boundaries in both the androgynous and effeminate directions, PRC society is forced to expand its conceptions of gender identities in a modernizing state.

In addition to a discussion of femininity's changing appearance in the contemporary PRC, I will also discuss the concept of a *wenrou* (tender) male, imported primarily from Taiwan. It is critical to our understanding of femininity to also reflect upon the changing nature of masculinities on the unstable social frontier of the contemporary PRC, where language is changing and expanding to include new ways of speaking about gender and sexual orientation issues. As mentioned briefly in Chapter 1, this *wenrou* trend brought from Taiwan is also applicable to women who choose to portray themselves as more emotionally tender and fragile, but the use of this term to apply to males who specifically choose this image for themselves is a significant departure from the heroic revolutionary songs and Beijing rock scene that PRC citizens were previously accustomed to within the last fifty years.

Amidst these popular music changes, the listening and viewing audience across the PRC and other parts of the Chinese-speaking world are constantly receiving mixed signals about what it means to identify with a particular gender. These mixed signals create difficulties in establishing clear self-identity and self-understanding, which have become evident through

literature and even social media since the beginning of the 1978 reform and opening shift and which have magnified even more today.

SNH48 and Contemporary PRC Femininity

As the influence of foreign countries has grown in the past decades in the PRC, the strength of Japanese cultural influence has been particularly evident. As discussed in Chapter 1, one of the most significant musical and cultural phenomena passed from Japan to the PRC is the *kawaii* (*ke'ai*) image. One of the ways in which Japan has fostered this culture of cuteness is through idol production. The idea began with competitions that placed emphasis not just on singing talent or physical appearance but on engaging with an audience and increasing the seeming accessibility of idols to the general public.[48] These singers were then placed in gendered groups and sold to the public through appearances in television commercials, recording companies, and talent agencies. Now, this system has been exported around East Asia, along with the spread of the cuteness culture that accompanies idols whose images intentionally remind fans of an average person they might know. Drawing on the highly successful Japanese-style production of idols, usually women in their teenage years or early twenties, the producer Akimoto Yasushi created the Japanese band AKB48 (which stands for Akihabara), made up of about sixty teenage girls with carefully choreographed clothing, dances, and appearances. Because of the success of the commercial venture (which sold millions of CDs, in addition to developing a line of fan clothing and gifts that sparked an enormous fan culture around the girls' careers), the producer created several other sister groups in other areas of Japan. Each of the bands is named after the city in which they are based, such as SKE48 in Sakae, Nagoya or

[48] Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin, "Japan's Regional Model," in *Regionalizing Culture: The Political Economy of Japanese Popular Culture in Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 131.

NMB48 in Namba, Osaka.[49] These ventures have all been highly successful both within Japan and internationally, as Japan's global commercial and culture influence peaked in recent years.

After several other successful ventures into countries around East Asia such as Singapore and Indonesia, the producer also debuted the next sister group SNH48 in Shanghai in 2012. The name SNH48 stands for Shanghai 48, which is part of what is referred to more fully as the *Zhongguo Daxing Nuzi Ouxiang Zuhe* (China Large-Scale Female Idol Association, also known as *Zhongguo Daxing Nuzi Ouxiang Tuanti* on the official Chinese website).[50] Currently composed of over one hundred female singers divided among multiple groups, the young women have developed a huge fan following.[51] AKS Co. Ltd. and Ninestyle, the two companies who jointly established SNH48, also built a theater in Shanghai in the same year as the group's founding to house their performances. In 2016, the group was separated from its original group AKB48 due to accusations of contract violations; since then, SNH48 has maintained its presence in the PRC independently.[52] In their first five years of existence, SNH48 has released more than a dozen EPs, including multiple which were entirely original works, as well as holding auditions for the second through eighth generations of new members (who were then assigned to several different teams under the broader SNH48 umbrella). The group has also hosted three general elections, in which fans who have proved their dedication through purchasing specific merchandise and albums can vote to select their favorite singer to be featured in the next EP and to select the other women who will also participate in the EP. This style of general elections is

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[49] Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin, "Japan's Regional Model," in *Regionalizing Culture: The Political Economy of Japanese Popular Culture in Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 133.
[50] "*Zhongguo Daxing Nüzi Ouxiang Zuhe* SNH48," SNH48 Official Website, accessed January 20, 2018, www.snh48.com.
[51] "SNH48 *Chengyuan,*" SNH48 Official Website, accessed January 20, 2018, www.snh48.com/member_list.php.
[52] Jordan To, "How Japanese Girl Group AKB48 Was Let Down by Its Chinese Baby," *EJ Insight*. Last modified June 14, 2016. Accessed March 6, 2018. http://www.ejinsight.com/20160614-how-japanese-girl-group-akb48-was-let-down-by-its-chinese-baby/.

common in fan-driven idol groups, which also originated as a tradition in Japanese idol-production groups.[53] After many years of success both independently and through "China's Got Talent" and performing at the Shanghai Strawberry Music Festival, SNH48 has established itself as a powerful cultural commodity in the Chinese-speaking world.

An important factor that allows these women to be so successful in gaining PRC fans is the careful selection of women who are from the PRC. The group accepted two Japanese members at its inception, Mariya Suzuki and Sae Miyazawa, but both were later dismissed or left the group to return to Japan. Because the group is now composed entirely of women from the PRC, it is a clear representation to the PRC of what its women can do and what they identify with. However, one of the first identities that SNH48 put forth was through their 2014 release of their first album, whose title was in Japanese (*Mae Shika Mukanee*) and which was based on AKB48's thirty-fifth single by the same name that reached number one on Billboard's weekly charts in March of 2014. Because Japanese modernity and J-Pop were so influenced by US popular culture in the 1970s and 80s, Japanese culture came to represent modernity to the rest of East Asia as various nations undertook modernization processes.[54] The clear Japanese inspiration of SNH48's music and performance style demonstrates SNH48's desire to represent themselves as modern and cosmopolitan, and simultaneously as PRC women. Because they are all PRC women, their identity is more readily acceptable to PRC citizens who do not feel that they are being subjected to foreign cultural invasion, but are more comfortable with new gender ideas as presented through women who are intentionally familiar. These idols are intended to "represent the notion that 'anybody can be a star.'"[55] Their carefully choreographed images, sounds, and

[53] Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin, "Japan's Regional Model," in *Regionalizing Culture: The Political Economy of Japanese Popular Culture in Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 133.
[54] Ibid, 135.
[55] Ibid, 131.

associations with other forms of media are selected to add to this "PRC-ness," giving it an added sense of authenticity.

Also originating from Japanese idol-production industries' conceptions of the "tie-up strategy," the importance of association of songs or their singers with popular television dramas and commercials is crucial to gaining fame and increasing revenue.[56] The women of SNH48 frequently meet their fans in handshake events to increase feelings of familiarity. Once an audience member has multiple opportunities to engage with a group such as SNH48 via a variety of media sources, the group becomes increasingly relatable, even if the material presented is quite unfamiliar. These women collectively represent the power of femininity to gain both emotional and financial support from PRC consumers, as SNH48 and its other branch groups in the PRC (BEJ48 in Beijing, GNZ48 in Guangzhou, and others) have been hugely successful both on the internet and on their live tours. Some of the members were even selected to participate in the 2017 CCTV New Year special with Coco Lee and JJ Lin; this is a major television event which is broadcast to the entire country and around the globe to celebrate a holiday that reminds people of their national identity as PRC citizens and inheritors of Chinese cultural values.[57] Thus, through their Shanghai base, multiple counterparts around the PRC, and national television appearances, the women of SNH48 constantly remind PRC citizens that they share an identity in the PRC, but also that they are females who have an important cultural statement to share with their country and the world.

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[56] Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin, "Japan's Regional Model," in *Regionalizing Culture: The Political Economy of Japanese Popular Culture in Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 136-137.

[57] To understand the importance of Chinese New Year in defining Chineseness and reminding people of their cultural traditions, one needs to look no further than the 2018 Chinese New Year tensions caused by a Chinese supermodel (*Liu Wen*) who wished her social media fans a "Happy Lunar New Year" but was forced to change her post to "Happy Chinese New Year." This social media faux-pas made it to international news, including BBC News (http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-43127128).

Another way in which the members of SNH48 share their identity with their consumers is through the massive fan culture surrounding their enterprise. Although this is common with other singers, such as the Fayenatics of Faye Wong discussed in Chapter 1, the fan culture surrounding SNH48 is especially significant because the fans have the power to decide the future of individual members of the group. The annual general elections held to select the most important member of SNH48, who will then be featured prominently in the upcoming discography and video projects, are one critical way in which fans can exert their influence. In order to become a fan, one must purchase a certain quantity of merchandise and attend regular events, and by doing so, demonstrate their true dedication to the members of SNH48 and the group's future. The women selected are thus representatives of the PRC audience's visual and auditory aesthetic values. While we cannot claim that the demographic makeup of fan groups is representative of the entire population spread, as most people do not have the disposable income to purchase fan apparel, tickets, CDs, or other merchandise, the consumers with purchasing power do support SNH48. For the woman selected each year to represent the group, it is a huge honor and often provides the impetus for her individual career growth. Thus, the fans' decision is quite important for her and for the future direction of SNH48.

Through this fan election method, the women of SNH48 are constantly competing for popularity. After holding annual elections in 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017, the group's management has clearly established the importance of voter opinions, in that the winners of these elections receive special performance opportunities and higher positioning within the group. For example, the top sixteen women in the 2014 election were highlighted in a special concert in September 2014 to announce the re-opening of the SNH48 theater in Shanghai after renovations. The first-place winner is also often featured on the upcoming EP releases of the next year. In

order to win these prized fan votes and improve her own position within the group (whether that means moving from Team B to Team A or winning a top position among the group members), a member must present herself as the most desirable or the most ideal woman. These women are constantly asserting their femininity, but the feminine ideal that they portray is not one which is supposed to emphasize physical sexuality according to the origins of the Japanese idol-production industry. Instead, they should "represent the notion that 'anyone can be a star'" and should be "'life-sized,' meaning they are depicted as fairly standard, just like 'the girl or boy next door.'"[58]

The task of winning voter support is not only difficult because of the aforementioned desire for members to seem relatable (while still standing out), but also because SNH48 photoshoots and group performances typically feature every member in identical clothing, performing identical choreography, as is the trademark of so many girl bands or boy bands. Thus, it is seemingly impossible to stand out. Instead, fans must learn about each woman individually through her member profile on the "Members" section of the SNH48 website or through her individual social media profile. On each woman's profile, anyone with Internet access can easily view not only the height, date of birth, and birthplace of each member, but also details such as blood type which would more often be viewed as an overstep of personal privacy boundaries by Western audiences. On the SNH48 website and in the group's other social media, each of the five teams of women are all given a tiny portion of the page for their personal image because of the large size of the teams, which also makes it difficult to establish oneself as an individual. Instead, it is easy to glance at images such as the following advertisement for SNH48 and process it only as a sea of members who perform together.

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[58] Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin, "Japan's Regional Model," in *Regionalizing Culture: The Political Economy of Japanese Popular Culture in Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 131.

Figure 3. The women of SNH48's Team SII, all displayed in a group collage image on the "Members" section of the group's website.

Their *ke'ai* hair styles, such as braids with brightly colored bows, matching pink or red school-girl outfits, and innocent smiles all add to the collective image of SNH48. Because of the voter-driven nature of SNH48, it is clear that these modes of dressing are appealing to audiences, but it is also clear that these women are expected to distinguish themselves from each other, whether it is through their haircut, performance specialties, or mannerisms at personal handshake events where fans can meet the members. SNH48's widespread success across the PRC also reveals that there are still fans who identify with the more traditional social system where women are often perceived and presented as part of a package, should not be anything more than average, and should not stand out on their own. These gender norms seem to place women back under the auspices of the "better to be seen, not heard" mentality of earlier Confucianism, but their various hair colors, styles, and personalities still allow the women of SNH48 to be successful at broadcasting powerful, cute, and sometimes even sexy images of contemporary female ideals to their fans and the broader Chinese-speaking audience. The small ways in which they express their creativity as individuals can truly make or break their careers, thus motivating each woman to stand out even among her costars and create a space for herself.

FFC-Acrush and Androgyny in the PRC

Across the gender spectrum from the girlish, cute images of the members of SNH48 who take pride in showing their femininity are the members of another one of the PRC's trending girl-groups. This band, composed of five cisgender women, originated as a means to provide musical representation for the sector of the PRC population who did not identify with mainstream gender norms and cater to the changing market of women who feel that female singers are more relatable. Founded in early 2017, the band was an instant success, with almost one million fans on their Weibo profile within the first several months of their existence and before they had released any music of their own.[59] The group was inspired by the huge success of Li Yuchun (Chris Lee), an androgynous female pop idol in the PRC who won "Supergirl" in 2005 and subsequently launched her solo Mandopop career. Her appearance with short hair, masculine clothing, and neutral facial makeup allows her to relate more directly with manga fans and other youth of the current generation who have discovered the beauty in both traditional males and in women who dress or look like males. After winning "Supergirl," she even went on to star in several movies, secure advertisement contracts, and appear on the cover of "Time Magazine Asia." Chris Lee has attracted many male and female fans alike with her androgynous image.

FFC-Acrush, known also as Acrush, has since captured the same market by targeting the younger generation. The five members of Acrush were recruited using a star-production model based on the success of the K-Pop and J-Pop industries, wherein the members were auditioned and trained from cities across the country. The goal of this model is to create a group where each member can eventually become individually successful across a large market. Behind this effort is the Zhejiang Huati Culture Communication Company, Ltd., which is an entertainment group

[59] Zheping Huang, "China's hottest new boy band is actually made up of five androgynous girls," Quartz Media, last modified March 30, 2017, accessed December 31, 2017, https://qz.com/944691/ffc-acrush-chinas-hottest-new-boy-band-is-actually-made-up-of-five-androgynous-girls/.

stemming from Tencent's business incubator.[60] The resulting five women selected from Huati's star hunt now work together to create music of their own and connect with their fans. Because of their association with the sports name FFC, an abbreviation for Fantasy Football Confederation, the members also have to learn to play soccer and incorporate it into their stage performances; this sporty yet well-dressed look is evident in some of their promotional photography, as well as in their clothing and performance style.[61] Their sporty but polished look makes them reminiscent of boy bands such as One Direction in the US, as well as Exo and SMAP (Sports Music Assemble People) in Japan. As one reporter writes,

> At first blush, the five members of Acrush resemble the prototypical Simon Cowell-culled group: boyishly handsome, impeccably groomed, freakishly flawless in a way that mortal teen-agers typically aren't… When I first saw images of the band, in the spring, I was convinced that it had been around for years. This is, in part, because its members resemble every other male pop star – androgynous boys whose porcelain skin and elfin features have become the standard of beauty in East Asia. (The type is so prevalent that it even has a name: flower boys.)[62]

This trend of cross-dressing is not entirely new to China, however. A quick look at Chinese history reveals such obvious examples of cross-dressing as Hua Mulan, later made into a common children's story by Disney's movie (albeit with some modifications). However, there

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[60] Zheping Huang, "China's hottest new boy band is actually made up of five androgynous girls," Quartz Media, last modified March 30, 2017, accessed December 31, 2017, https://qz.com/944691/ffc-acrush-chinas-hottest-new-boy-band-is-actually-made-up-of-five-androgynous-girls/.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Jiayang Fan, "The Stifled Desires Behind Acrush, The Chinese Boy Band Made Up of Five Girls," The New Yorker, last modified July 1, 2017, accessed January 1, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-stifled-desires-behind-acrush-the-chinese-boy-band-made-up-of-five-girls.

are also numerous other examples of this cross-dressing trend, such as Peking Opera and Yue Opera, which both require cross-dressing (Peking Opera positions male actors in female roles, while Yue Opera positions women in male roles). Cross-dressing is a cultural phenomenon that also surfaced in the 1920s and 30s, when it was acceptable for a woman to dress as a man, but not vice versa. In this case, it became increasingly evident that China operated within Durkheim's system of "dichotomous distinction." Because the society viewed gender identities through an A and Not-A lens (in this case "male" and "not male") and because "continuity between terms is a logical impossibility for distinctions phrased as A/not-A," Chinese society asserted that "Not-A is only the privation or absence of A."[63] Thus, A (male) is the only positive term, so it was made acceptable for women to strive to become more like men (Not-A becoming A) by cross-dressing but not acceptable for men to cross-dress like women. Because Chinese society was already somewhat familiar with the concept of female cross-dressing, it was easier for Chris Lee and Acrush to succeed. This is not to say that the members of Acrush did not take a substantial risk by choosing to publicly display their androgyny, but the foundation for their acceptance was previously established by opera, twentieth century cultural trends, and influences such as Japanese anime's "Boys' Love" trend that has since infiltrated much of the East Asian market.[64]

FFC-Acrush has taken significant care to ensure that their appearance clearly translates this cross-dressing androgynous style, both through the soccer clothing used in some performances and in their daily clothing. According to the group's agent Zhou Xiaobai, "The five members have been dressing like boys in their daily lives long before they took to the

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[63] Nancy Jay, "Gender and Dichotomy," *Feminist Studies* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 45.
[64] Jiayang Fan, "The Stifled Desires Behind Acrush, The Chinese Boy Band Made Up of Five Girls," The New Yorker, last modified July 1, 2017, accessed January 1, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-stifled-desires-behind-acrush-the-chinese-boy-band-made-up-of-five-girls.

stage."[65] Since a young age, they have been mistaken for boys when entering public restrooms or in other public spaces. Their unique androgynous style was evident from the group's inception, through their promotional images and meet-and-greet events in early 2017. For example, the following image was the first group image released on their social media accounts on March 30, 2017.

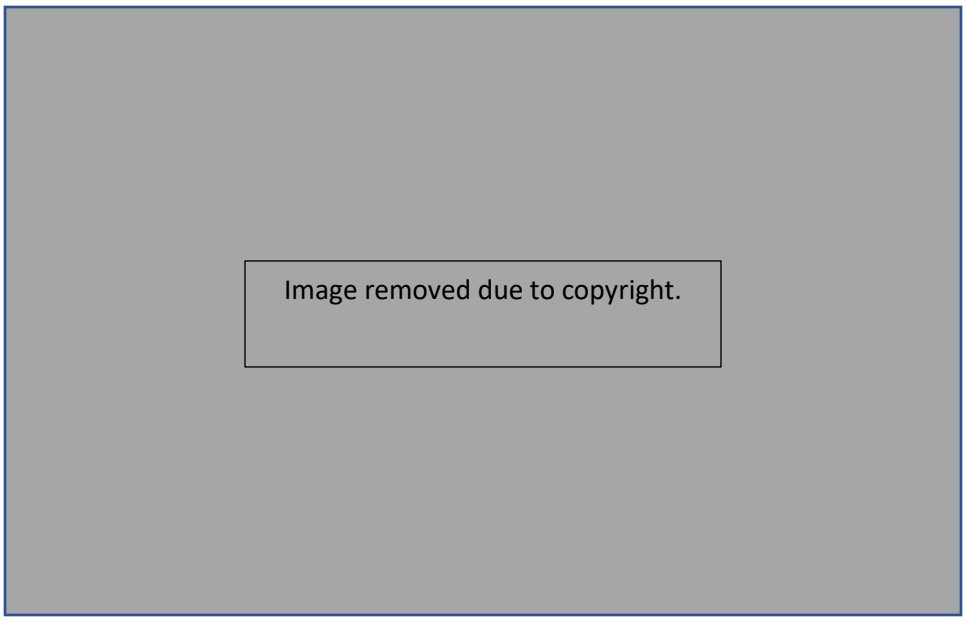

Figure 4. FFC-Acrush group photo, Instagram.

The intensity of the blue, black, and gray used in this photograph displays a clear departure from the "knee socks, pony tails and other symbols of girlish cuteness"[66] evident in groups such as SNH48. The combination of short hair styles, clothing colors typically associated with males, and sporty imagery make FFC-Acrush a clear portrayal of androgyny to the PRC audience.

[65] Zheping Huang, "China's hottest new boy band is actually made up of five androgynous girls," Quartz Media, last modified March 30, 2017, accessed December 31, 2017, https://qz.com/944691/ffc-acrush-chinas-hottest-new-boy-band-is-actually-made-up-of-five-androgynous-girls/.
[66] Ibid.

While these five stars no doubt collectively represent androgyny and pushing boundaries, which can be uncomfortable in a country where homosexuality was thought to be a mental illness until 2001, they are also hugely popular because of their relatability. One of the most discussed aspects of the group online is their ability to draw fans from across the country and East Asia in general because of their image, music, and personality. As previously discussed, fan culture is paramount in the PRC music industry due to the need to adjust for revenue lost to piracy. Acrush fans are initially attracted to the band members for many different reasons, but most say that they feel a closer connection to the members because they are female instead of male.[67]

One reason for this relatability is the strict dating culture which remains common in the PRC in particular. Girls are not typically allowed to date during middle or even high school, leaving them with many questions and uncertain feelings about how to interact with males (the same applies in reverse to males interacting with females, but is less relevant to Acrush fans). The fans of Acrush are predominantly females in their teens and early twenties, who say that they "like Acrush more than equally handsome boy bands…because the five members can understand them better."[68] FFC-Acrush's producers have been instrumental in creating this sense of understanding, because they require Acrush members to respond to every fan message on social media and show gratitude to fans for their support. Another reason for the feeling of relatability that Acrush fans experience is that those fans who tend to have little previous exposure to relationships with men can use Acrush members as their fantasy. Many of the

[67] Jiayang Fan, "The Stifled Desires Behind Acrush, The Chinese Boy Band Made Up of Five Girls," The New Yorker, last modified July 1, 2017, accessed January 1, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-stifled-desires-behind-acrush-the-chinese-boy-band-made-up-of-five-girls.

[68] Zheping Huang, "China's hottest new boy band is actually made up of five androgynous girls," Quartz Media, last modified March 30, 2017, accessed December 31, 2017, https://qz.com/944691/ffc-acrush-chinas-hottest-new-boy-band-is-actually-made-up-of-five-androgynous-girls/.

group's fans travel hundreds or thousands of miles to watch the group perform, while others write love letters to members of the group, send them messages on social media, or dream about having a life with the singers. While real-life relationships in the PRC are dictated by heterosexual rules and expectations set in place by long-standing societal constraints, the idea of a pure romance between a fan and an idol allows fans to explore their own feelings while the idols also gain supporters.

In addition, in a culture that enforces a divide between the sexes, as discussed in sociologist Sandra Bem's theory of gender polarization,[69] females are often viewed as more emotional and submissive, but this androgynous and sporty group allows women to see a new form of femininity to which they may not previously have been exposed. Instead of encountering the opposite sex for the first time as adults, Acrush allows fans to engage with their own sexuality and gender identity as tweens and teens. For example, the group's motto is "A group advocating freedom, not bounded by frames,"[70] which allows fans who fall outside of the heterosexual cisgender world to identify with FFC-Acrush's musical and stylistic freedom. Although the stars are not allowed to discuss their sexual orientation because of restrictions placed on them by their agent and production company, they clearly depart from the norm and thus provide a resource and inspiration for young women seeking a new style or for young women seeking to learn about interactions with male figures.

One of the many ways in which FFC-Acrush also sets itself apart is through their use of pronouns, which is a relatively new concept in Mandarin Chinese. A complicating factor in

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[69] For more information about Sandra Bem's definition of gender polarization, see the second section of her 1993 publication *Lenses of Gender*.

[70] Zheping Huang, "China's hottest new boy band is actually made up of five androgynous girls," Quartz Media, last modified March 30, 2017, accessed December 31, 2017, https://qz.com/944691/ffc-acrush-chinas-hottest-new-boy-band-is-actually-made-up-of-five-androgynous-girls/.

Mandarin is the pronunciation of "he," "she," and "it" all as the first-tone *ta*, even though the character for each pronunciation has a different radical.[71] The character for "he" has the male radical on the left half, while the character for "she" has the female radical on the left; for identities in the middle of the gender spectrum, it has long been difficult to fit within the constructs of the Chinese language, making a gender binary the expectation in Chinese society. In most cases, the Chinese language uses proper names instead of pronouns to address this issue. However, in the case of FFC-Acrush, the members have adopted the term *meishaonian* (handsome youth), which is a gender-neutral three-character compound. Their social media references the collective group as Acrush *shaoniantuan*, which means "group of youths" and also has no gender association. Through a well-coordinated and well-executed conscious effort on the part of the producer and the members of FFC-Acrush, the band has established itself with entirely gender-neutral pronouns; however, the fans of Acrush have deviated quite far from this propagated gender-neutral terminology to referring to their favorite members as *laogong* (husband).[72] This term, used most commonly on male celebrities and boy band stars like Justin Bieber, is "the highest compliment available to boy band members"[73] and reflects "feeling a genuine 'bond' with the stars."[74] It is a term which suggests fantasizing about the potential for a deeper relationship between fan and star, even in circumstances such as this where it is

[71] In the written system of Mandarin, the most common category of characters is called phono-semantic characters, meaning that half of the character provides a clue to the sound of the syllable and half of the character hints at the general meaning of the syllable. For example, the characters 把， 吧，and 爸 are all pronounced *ba* because they all feature the same component (on either the right or the bottom half), which indicates pronunciation. However, on the left half (or the top), the radicals indicate using the hand (to grasp), the mouth (to turn a statement into a suggestion using speech), or referencing the father (in the noun for "dad"). In the case of "he" (他) and "she" (她), the characters similarly use the male and female radicals, respectively.
[72] Jiayang Fan, "The Stifled Desires Behind Acrush, The Chinese Boy Band Made Up of Five Girls," The New Yorker, last modified July 1, 2017, accessed January 1, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-stifled-desires-behind-acrush-the-chinese-boy-band-made-up-of-five-girls.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

impossible for such a relationship to form. This level of fan adoration, while common for other groups in the contemporary PRC, reflects that the unique identity of Acrush members also has an important and equally marketable place in the PRC music industry.

Finally, FFC-Acrush sets themselves apart through the lyrics used in their original music recordings. One needs to look no further than the group's first single, released in April 2017, to find lyrics that defy the stereotype of a passive, emotional, submissive woman. The song, titled "Xing Dong Pai" ("Activists," "Go-Getters," or "Action"), has many lyrics which state boldly and clearly the power of individuality and the importance of living for one's own sake. This is a clear contrast from the countless instances of emotionally vulnerable lyrics given to female singers in Mark Moskowitz's *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow*. Instead, lyrics such as the ones transcribed and translated below demonstrate the five members' commitment uniqueness through strength.

"Xing Dong Pai" by FFC-Acrush

I refuse to continue this insignificant existence
How do I remove this label, so I can decide my own life?
I don't exist for anyone else[75]

In only these three excerpted lines, it is clear that the singers (who are also the songwriters) are advocating for rejecting labels that are placed on them by society and living with individual purpose. These lyrics reflect hope that the singers might increase their independence and spread the message of believing in your own merits even when other people disagree. In a society where

[75] Original Chinese lyrics removed due to copyright. "*Xing Dong Pai* (Activists)," Genius.com, accessed February 10, 2018, https://genius.com/Acrush-action-lyrics. Translation by author.

historical social constructs still carry weight in many households, it is important to give young listeners the empowerment necessary to allow them to step outside of societal boundaries.

From their androgynous clothing and hair to their empowering lyrics, FFC-Acrush strives to present androgyny as socially acceptable and meaningful in the twenty-first century PRC, a place which has only recently begun discussion of gender diversity issues. This stance, headed by their management and supported by their hundreds of millions of fans, shows that singers in the PRC are taking their own routes to address and understand issues of non-binary gender identities as the PRC modernizes.

Wenrou Males: Popular Boy Bands in the PRC

While girl bands are gaining increasing popularity in the PRC music industry, the influence of boy bands has a longer history and maintains a large hold on the market. All-male music groups stem from many influences, but the influence of rock music on the PRC's music scene in the 1980s provided one source of inspiration for groups of men articulating their masculinity and nationalistic ideas. However, since the return of Hong Kong in 1997 and the turn of the twenty-first century, the People's Republic of China has witnessed a rise in boy bands who portray a more effeminate physical appearance and emotional qualities that are not typically positively associated with masculinity in the PRC. For example, men who are overly sad about the end of a relationship or who long for their families or the past have been viewed negatively for many years. Recently, this trend has partially reversed, as the rise in influence from Taiwan has led to a larger portion of men who express a more *wenrou* (tender) image.[76] As Mark

[76] For more information about Taiwan and *wenrou* popular singers, consult Mark Moskowitz's 2010 *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and Its Cultural Connotations*.

Moskowitz describes it in *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow*, the concept of *wenrou* is a "complex gender alignment."[77] Based on his research, he writes,

> Most commonly translated as "tender," *wenrou* also encompasses nuances of being caring, sensitive, and feminine for women and, for men, quite effeminate by Western standards. To be successful, both male and female Mandopop performers must lyrically and visually perform *wenrou* identities. While this presents traditionalist concerns in the case of *wenrou* women, the *wenrou* male stands for antitraditionalism in portraying vulnerable, nonpatriarchal men.[78]

The male performers who engage in this *wenrou* presentation decidedly draw influence from Taiwan, where "…men are more often contrasted with Chinese men in the PRC as being more gentle and feminine than their PRC counterparts."[79] This *wenrou* identity is helpful in gaining music industry support because their images "…allow for a wider range of emotional expression than the relatively constrained roles available to heterosexual men in the United States. This assists in packaging melancholy, loneliness, and emotional vulnerability for the female audience, and in providing an ideal for caring men who make up for the men in women's real-life relationships."[80] Clearly, this Taiwanese ideal of *wenrou* men who are emotionally vulnerable and effeminate has been hugely successful with Hong Kong artist Leslie Cheung (*Zhong Guorong*) or more recently with some of the work of the famous Taiwanese star Jay Chou (*Zhou Jielun*). However, this ideal has also spread into the PRC, as men grapple with the societal

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[77] Mark Moskowitz, *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and Its Cultural Connotations* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 73.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 89.
[80] Ibid., 89.

expectations prescribed for them and women grapple with the difficult reality of the relationships that they find themselves in.

Wenrou-performing singers most often use their clothing and song lyrics to demonstrate their soft emotions, instead of identifying with the mainstream masculine personality traits that have are engrained in many nations which adhere to a gender binary. Drawing on influences from Taiwan's *wenrou* masculinity popular culture developments and traits of Japanese Enka, groups such as TFBoys (The Fighting Boys) have risen to popularity in the PRC recently, indicating a trend toward diversifying masculinities. This *wenrou* identity is one example of a male counterpart to the *lamei* and *ke'ai* trends discussed in Chapter 1 (although *wenrou* can also apply to women, but is less obviously a departure from the norm for women). As is typical for PRC Mandopop, though, this *wenrou* ideal is not merely a trend imported from South Korea and Taiwan, but the most successful *wenrou* performers have created unique identities to fit with Chinese social and political characteristics.

For TFBoys, popularity and stardom came from a very young age. The three members of what is known as the PRC's youngest band[81] began their collaboration in 2013, when they were in their early teenage years; since the formation of the group, they have been highly successful on Chinese-language social media, as well as earning the title of the most popular boy band in the PRC and being featured three times on CCTV's Chinese New Year Gala television program.[82] These three stars (Karry Wang, Roy Wang, and Jackson Yi) collectively express a *wenrou* identity not just through their looks and young age, but through the uplifting attitudes

[81] Junmian Zhang, "Top 10 Popular Idol Bands in China," China.org.cn, May 31, 2016, http://www.china.org.cn/top10/2016-05/31/content_38547711_4.htm.
[82] Ben Blanchard, "Chinese Superstars Steal New Year Show with First Duet in 20 Years," Reuters, February 15, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lunar-newyear-china/chinese-superstars-steal-new-year-show-with-first-duet-in-20-years-idUSKCN1FZ20D.

and genuine innocence expressed in their song lyrics and dance performances. Even though some of their songs still feature government-approved political messages in support of Communism, they manage to turn the same themes of 1980s Chinese rock into "bubblegum pop" (upbeat popular music often marketed to pre-teens and teenagers) that lifts spirits and wins popular praise. The group's fans, primarily women who identify as "mother fans" because of their age relative to the stars and their maternal feelings toward them, have spent countless sums of money celebrating their birthdays[83] and solidifying TFBoys' place as stars across the Chinese music industry.

To begin, the following images are two typical photographs from TFBoys' promotional materials, which can be found on their official social media accounts and on numerous articles across the Chinese-language and English-language internet.

Figure 5. TFBoys promotional materials.

It is immediately evident from the posture and smiling faces of the three boys that they are friendly and do not mind making physical contact with each other. This is a very clear demonstration of their close ties and emotional connection with each other, a sign which is in

[83] "Members of Popular Chinese Teen Band TFBoys Fan Maternal Instinct in Some Admirers," Straits Times, April 24, 2017, http://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/entertainment/members-of-popular-chinese-teen-band-tfboys-fan-maternal-instinct-in-some.

sharp contrast to the hyper-masculine postures assumed by previous rock singers or other boy bands. The clothing in the leftmost image also suggests that they do not wear hyper-masculine clothing, only dark colors, or sports attire. Instead, they can comfortably wear patterns such as polka dots, light/bright colors like white, and fashionable trends such as sweater vests. In fact, a *New York Times* article on the group says that the members of TFBoys "decidedly do not walk on the wild side…The group's music is cheerful with upbeat lyrics, and the boys' appearance tends toward neat outfits and sweet smiles."[84] Through their appearance, their fans have already made assumptions about the boys' future lives and are confident that they will stay wholesome and hardworking forever. One fan interviewed in the *New York Times* article, when asked what would happen if "one of them breaks loose and does something really scandalous" responded, "I don't believe they will. There's a Chinese saying: At the age of 3 you can already see what a man will be like when he is old."[85] These female fans who believe strongly in the good qualities of *wenrou* male performers is one reason, as Moskowitz confirms, that tender men are more appealing to women who seem to have lost hope in real-life relationships.

Outside of their physical appearances, which boost fan confidence in their wholesome nature, the band's lyrics also contribute to a *wenrou* identity. For example, on singer Roy Wang's birthday, he gave his fans a thank-you gift in return for their affection and support – the song was titled "Because I Met You" (*Yinwei Yujian Ni*). Beyond the endearing title, the lyrics of the song also reinforce his emotional vulnerability, compassion, tenderness, and wholesome character. Through the song, he establishes himself as a model of what every relationship should be and how people should talk to those who are important to them. Some of the lyrics of the first

[84] Karoline Kan, "In China, It's the Party That Keeps the Boy Band Going," *New York Times*, May 6, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/06/world/asia/china-tfboys-boy-band.html.
[85] Ibid.

verse and chorus, transcribed and translated below, are clear evidence of the tender/gentle character that Roy Wang portrays.

"Yinwei Yujian Ni" by Roy Wang

In the most beautiful times, I have you to depend on
You are my life's important meaning
How can I forget you?
Going forward hand in hand with you
Every day is worth remembering[86]

It is important to remember that these lyrics were written from the perspective of a young male star addressing his (primarily female) audience of fans and were given as a gift. This means that the lyrics are attempting to give the fans specifically what they want to hear; in this case, the female fans want to hear from their male idol about his desire to remember the relationship forever, to live hand in hand with each other, and to be an important part of the other person's life. These characteristics of a male partner in a relationship are expressed in emotionally vulnerable and (by Western standards) somewhat effeminate diction, which demonstrates Roy Wang's *wenrou* identity which successfully connects with his target audience. In other words, these are the lyrics that PRC women relate to and use as an escape from their own troubling relationship situations. His use of words such as *mei* (beautiful) to describe something other than a woman indicates his understanding of deeper visual aesthetics, something which "manly" singers would not ordinarily connect with or express in their songs. In addition, Wang's description of the listener as his life's *yiyi* (translated here as "meaning") reflects a stronger connection than can be accurately portrayed through the English word "meaning." The two-

[86] Original Chinese lyrics removed due to copyright. "TFBoys' Roy – Because I Met You," accessed February 1, 2018, https://strawberrymelodies.wordpress.com/2017/08/21/tfboys-%E7%8E%8B%E6%BA%90-because-i-meet-you-%E5%9B%A0%E4%B8%BA%E9%81%87%E8%A7%81%E4%BD%A0/. Translation by author.

character compound *yiyi* represents something between "meaning," "significance," and "importance," which in this usage conveys the idea that the listener is his purpose in life or the reason for his existence. Touching sentiments such as those portrayed in the first verse and chorus of this singular example, combined with the physical appearance and marketing of TFBoys, provide a clear demonstration of the *wenrou* identity that has become quite successful in the PRC in recent years.

Groups such as The Fighting Boys, one example of the *wenrou* trend, are evidence that expectations of male performers in the Mandopop industry are shifting toward the effeminate, reflecting a societal shift in perceptions of heterosexual relationships, as well as definitions of androgyny (*zhongxing*). The extensive fan culture of women who support these singers feel that *wenrou* men are more relatable than the hyper-masculine images presented in rock or Mandopop of the post-Cultural Revolution era, which motivates fans to consume even more of not only the stars' music, but also give their idols lavish gifts and spend time and money on concert tickets and merchandise. Clearly the influence of Taiwanese *wenrou* pop stars has had a significant impact on the evolution of male singers in the PRC, but the innovative performance of PRC *wenrou* males, combined with the specific cultural characteristics of the PRC, has allowed for women to identify strongly with these men, and in cases like TFBoys, the central government has even joined in the praise, since the three singers sometimes sing lyrics which praise communist values.[87] It is clear that Mandopop is not just a phenomenon of entertainment value for fans or the general public in the PRC, but carries with it political and social connotations which are quick to spread new ideas about relationships and gender norms across the nation and the Chinese-speaking world.

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[87] Karoline Kan, "In China, It's the Party That Keeps the Boy Band Going," *New York Times*, May 6, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/06/world/asia/china-tfboys-boy-band.html.

Conclusions

Whether it is through the evolution of girl bands who portray girlish cuteness or through boy bands who project tender images that border on Western conceptions of effeminacy, the Mandopop market in the People's Republic of China is clearly shifting quite quickly toward an understanding and marketability of gender diversity. The women of SNH48, who stand for everything one would typically expect of a girl band (from the highly stylized, choreographed dance numbers to the school-girl matching costumes), represent the influence of both Western pop groups and those from Japan and Korea on the stardom industry in the PRC. On the other end of the spectrum of cisgender female performers, groups such as FFC-Acrush project an androgynous image; this image comes at a time in Chinese history where women are finally allowed to express themselves as hyper-feminine after the Cultural Revolution, meaning that this shift toward androgyny is an important stance to show that being a woman in the PRC can have multiple images. For male performers, there has also been a noticeable shift from the Beijing rock era that capitalized on hyper-masculine images of power and nationalism in the 1980s toward a Taiwan-influenced tender male companion and partner image. Androgynous or seemingly effeminate groups such as the young stars of The Fighting Boys promote relationship ideals of emotional vulnerability and meaningful connection with which female fans of all ages readily identify. The rise in acceptance of androgyny for both male- and female-identifying performers represents an important point of transition in the PRC, where words to describe androgyny did not exist until the end of the last century and where homosexuality was considered a mental illness even into the twenty-first century.

As different sectors of the PRC community seek to both market and consume these new gender-diverse images in Mandopop, it is important to note the vast influence of social media such as Weibo, WeChat, and QQ Music in spreading these messages to and among consumers who are struggling within their own lives to establish their identity. The particular characteristics of the PRC, such as the government influence over which singers are popularized through appearances at high-profile events like the CCTV Chinese New Year Gala or the patriarchal structure which prevents young girls from experiencing dating culture until college and then quickly marks them as "leftovers" once they reach age 30 all contribute to the development of the PRC Mandopop industry. It is also important to keep in mind the historical phases of the PRC Mandarin-language popular music industry, which originated from a position of highlighting women, but transitioned to a male-dominated sphere during the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen eras. Now, as the industry shifts back toward central female figures, the variety of female identities and increasing effeminacy of male identities which are portrayed is just one way in which the PRC society is working toward understanding and accepting the diversity of gender identities which certainly exists within its population of more than one billion potential listeners.

Chapter 3: Finding "She" in "She Says" – JJ Lin's *Ta Shuo*

As I began studying foreign languages and engaging with peers from around the globe, I quickly realized that one of the most common mistakes for nonnative English speakers from certain mother tongues was the substitution of "he" for "she" (or vice versa), particularly in conversational settings. When I started learning Mandarin, I began to understand the reasons for this and it changed my perspective on why this mistake is so common; in Mandarin Chinese, the spoken words for "he," "she," and "it" are all transcribed not only with exactly the same Pinyin romanization, but with exactly the same tone.[88] In a language that prioritizes tones as a way of differentiating hundreds of homophonic syllables in spoken conversation, it was (and still is) difficult for me as a nonnative speaker to decipher which pronoun was being used in certain situations. When my Chinese calligraphy teacher in Beijing introduced me to Singaporean Mandopop singer-songwriter JJ Lin's album *Ta Shuo*, I realized that this ambiguity could be used to draw listeners in. Because she told me about the album in spoken Mandarin, I was still not entirely certain which characters to type into my Chinese search engine to find the music. Since there were only three options, it did not take me long to find out that the *ta* used in the album title referred to the female pronoun "she," but this ambiguity immediately piqued my curiosity about the contents of the album's song lyrics. Building on this experience, I argue in this chapter that this is one of the most important aspects of the Chinese language which is employed here; because song titles and lyrics are primarily meant to be spoken and listened to, singers and songwriters must be creative about the alternate ways through which the song lyrics communicate that the title of the song "Ta Shuo" (and the complete album *Ta Shuo*) reference

[88] It is important to note that tones in Chinese are phonemic. Also, because there are only 216 possible romanizations but tens of thousands of characters, fully comprehending the meaning sometimes requires reference to a written character.

"she" instead of "he" or "it." Through an investigation of the history of the *Ta Shuo* album, as well as the lyrical content of the title track "Ta Shuo" and other songs on the album, this chapter seeks to understand how the particularities of Mandarin Chinese gendered pronouns, as well as the gender identity of a singer or songwriter, can influence audience ability to understand the content of a song. The phenomenon of men writing songs for female singers, discussed further in Mark Moskowitz's *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow*,[89] is not unique to JJ Lin's work in *Ta Shuo*, but the innovative ways in which singers and songwriters navigate these gender dynamics within the Mandopop industry in the PRC deserves further consideration. In addition to the creativity used by singers and songwriters as they experiment with gender performativity as a realm of identity, it is also important to note the ways in which PRC audiences are receptive to popular music as a domain of creativity from artists who are not necessarily from the PRC.

Introduction to JJ Lin and *Ta Shuo*

JJ Lin (*Lin Junjie*), a Singaporean singer, songwriter, actor, and record producer, is a highly decorated star in the world of Mandopop. When his career began in 2003, he was signed to work with the Ocean Butterflies label in Singapore, but switched to working with Warner Music Taiwan in 2011; during his nine-year stint with Ocean Butterflies, he released eight albums which were all successful across Asia. In addition, he opened his own trendy clothing brand called SMG ("Still Moving under Gunfire"), pronounced as "Smudge." The clothing brand's website remarks that "SMG is a lifestyle label that recognizes the stressful moments and volatile nature of life and how one literally feels that he or she is 'under gunfire' in life's daily grind…The brand states boldly for all to still move, despite being under "gunfire" with the hope,

[89] See Moskowitz 2010, Chapter 5, "Men Writing Songs for Women Who Complain about Men."

faith and strength to conquer all adversities that constantly try to "Smudge" our lives in this modern society."[90] JJ Lin created this brand, which now has stores in the PRC and Taiwan, because "While JJ is a singer/composer, producer, and actor, who has achieved huge success in Greater China, Taiwan, Hongkong, Singapore, Malaysia and other parts of Asia, he is also passionate about the street scene, fashion and pop art (from art toys to fine urban-styled art)."[91] This clothing brand, one of the ways in which JJ Lin has established himself as an international presence, allows him to express his identity and simultaneously allows PRC consumers to conspicuously consume his identity.

In addition to his success with SMG, JJ Lin is a great example of a transnational artist who is Singaporean by birth, but whose family ancestry traces to Fujian province and to Kinmen. His mother's native language is Hokkien (spoken by the Hoklo people of Taiwan and Singapore), in which he occasionally sings, in addition to Cantonese. JJ Lin currently lives and works in Taiwan, but writes music in Cantonese, Hokkien, and most importantly for this case study, in Mandarin Chinese. The personal biography on his website does not mention that he is Singaporean or that he lives in Taiwan; whether this is because he is intentionally avoiding the information or because it was simply not a central focus of his identity that he wants to highlight, it is important to note the role that these identities have in his music and international reception. To add to his multi-faceted identity, while JJ Lin was growing up, he studied at Singapore's Anglo-Chinese School, a Methodist secondary school with a gifted education program and an international focus, in addition to completing his mandatory two-year national service requirement.

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[90] "The Concept," About, SMG, accessed February 1, 2018, http://www.smglife.com/about/.
[91] Ibid.

After finishing his schooling and service, he signed with Ocean Butterflies in 2003 (at age 22), where he was known for his songwriting skills and his writing for famous artists such as Taiwanese singer-songwriter A-Mei. As he became increasingly famous, he released a quick succession of annual albums of his own compositions, which won him many awards, including the Golden Melody Awards (Best Composer, Best Mandarin Male Singer 2016), Singapore Hit Awards (Best Male Vocalist 2010), World Music Awards (Best Male Artist 2007), Beijing Music Awards (Best Album, Best Producer 2006), and Taiwan Hito Pop Music Awards (Overseas Singer Award 2006). In addition to his reputation as a highly awarded international music figure, he has also swept the Chinese-speaking internet world with several of his album releases. In 2011, his first Warner Music album *Lost N Found* (here, *Xue Bu Hui* is translated as *Lost N Found* for the album, but as "Never Learn" for the title track within the album) received more than ten million downloads and views on the internet within three months.[92] According to his biography, this internet success made him "the king of the Asian music world" (*Yazhou yuetan tianwang*).[93] A similar internet album release sensation happened at the end of 2014 with the release of his eleventh studio album *Genesis* (*Xin Diqiu*), which "swept away all local and foreign entities" (*hengsao haineiwai suoyou shiti*) when it earned the top spot on over one hundred charts.[94]

In recent years, JJ Lin has collaborated with important international pop music stars such as American singer-songwriter Jason Mraz, Korean rock band singer Jung Yong Hwa, and J-pop star Ayumi Hamasaki, earning him international recognition, tour stops in key music industry destinations, and television appearances across much of Asia. He has performed at major events

[92] "Biography," JJ Lin Official Website, accessed January 30, 2018, http://www.jjlin.com/static/biography.html. Translation by author.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.

such as a CCTV charity event for the victims of the Sichuan earthquake (2008), the Chingay Parade (2015) and even Singapore's National Day Parade (2015). JJ Lin's international success, both on the internet and as a Mandopop recording artist, has given him significant influence over the future vision of Mandopop in the coming decades.

Ta Shuo

Ta Shuo, JJ Lin's eighth Mandarin studio album released on January 21, 2011 by Ocean Butterflies and distributed by Avex Taiwan, is a collection of ten songs, plus a "Disc 2" with several bonus tracks. All of the songs on the album are ones that Lin had originally written for other female singers. The album is situated between his previous album *100 Days* and his later album *Lost N Found*. He performed five of the ten "Disc 1" songs at the 2011 Golden Melody Awards held in Taipei, Taiwan, at which he was nominated for the "Best Mandarin Album" award. In the end, the award went to Jay Chou, but JJ Lin's nomination cemented *Ta Shuo* as a significant part of his discography. The complete list of songs on the album are as follows.[95]

1. She Says (*Ta Shuo*, 她说)
2. Smiling Eyes (*Aixiao de Yanjing*, 爱笑的眼睛)
3. Feel for You (*Zhi Dui Ni You Ganjue*, 只对你有感觉)
4. Whenever (*Dang Ni*, 当你)
5. Forever (*Yi Yan Wannian*, 一眼万年)
6. Protective Colors (*Baohu Se*, 保护色)
7. The Taste of Love (*Wo bu Zhu de Ta*, 握不住的他)
8. Wall (*Xinqiang*, 心墙)
9. Loving Her (*Wo Hen Xiang Ai Ta*, 我很想爱他)
10. Eternal Love (*Yi Sheng de Ai*, 一生的爱)
11. Remember (*Jide*, 记得)
12. Perfect World (*Wanmei Xin Shijie*, 完美新世界)

[95] All English translations of titles are taken directly from the Avex Taiwan website. Some do not accurately reflect the entire Chinese meaning of the titles, which will be discussed later in the paper when discrepancies are related to gendered pronoun usage.

13. I AM [96]

The album's contents are described as "classic female songs with a male singer which have an entirely new interpretation" (*jingdian nü ge nan chang quanxin yanyi*).[97] This is because the contents of the album were originally written for female artists to perform, but composed by JJ Lin, a male songwriter. This phenomenon, which Moskowitz discusses extensively, is by no means new to the Mandopop industry. In fact, it is very common both to have separate singers, songwriters, and lyricists, as well as for the gender identity of each of these contributors to be mixed. Most of the people whom I interviewed in Beijing and Shanghai, when asked to identify their favorite Mandopop song, could immediately list all of the people involved in creating it (singer, songwriter, lyricist, or the appropriate combination of these creative forces). If this phenomenon is so common, it seems that claims for the significance of JJ Lin's *Ta Shuo* album with its multiple genders of singers and songwriters should be taken with a grain of salt. However, through an analysis of JJ Lin's 2011 *Ta Shuo*, we see that this is not just a coincidence, thus we can begin to understand the importance of his impact on gender ideologies in the music industry and in broader societal contexts. As I will explain below, the lyrics, ways in which JJ Lin articulates gender identity while using homophonic pronouns, and ways in which the songs are transformed from their original intent (to be sung by female artists) make *Ta Shuo* an important case study.

To begin this analysis of JJ Lin's eighth studio album, we must first understand some background information about the creation of the songs on the album. First, it is important to note which songs on the album were performed by other singers before JJ Lin's recording for *Ta*

[96] "JJ Lin," Avex Taiwan, accessed February 3, 2018, http://www.avex.com.tw/Artist/artist_disco.asp?ArtistCode=JJXXXT&c=4.
[97] Ibid.

Shuo. "Whenever" was created for Cyndi Wang, "Remember" for A-Mei, and "Wall" for Claire Guo. Cyndi Wang is a Taiwanese singer and actress who was familiar to Lin both because she has a contract with Avex Taiwan, the distributor of JJ Lin's albums, and because the two previously co-starred in several 2006 films. A-Mei is another famous Taiwanese female singer, who is known for being one of the most awarded female singers in Mandopop. Her Golden Melody Award winnings and record sales have earned her international recognition, and she has performed several of JJ Lin's works. Claire Guo, a Taiwanese television host and singer, did not debut her first album until 2007, but quickly established her place alongside stars such as Cyndi Wang and A-Mei after winning the "Best Newcomer" award for her first album. Finally, one of the songs on the album, "Protective Colors" (also translated as "Camouflage") is actually a collaboration with Taiwanese singer Angela Zhang. JJ Lin's frequent collaborations with female singers who perform his songs are not surprising in the Mandopop industry, as mentioned previously, but in his own album *Ta Shuo*, he turns these gender dynamics which audiences are so accustomed to seeing and hearing in the opposite direction. Instead of hearing a female voice perform his songs, he changes the mood of the songs and makes them his own; through this process, he carefully navigates the complexities of masculine and feminine identities in contemporary Chinese culture.

For this case study, it is critical to understand the title track of his album *She Says*, which inspired the entire album. In this song, JJ Lin works with Singaporean singer-songwriter Stefanie Sun to create a piece which can only be described as emotional and romantic. According to the caption of the official music video released on Taihe Records' YouTube channel, "As soon as Stefanie Sun heard this song's demo, she was deeply attracted, so she wrote the lyrics for it"

(*Sun Yanzi yi tingdao zheshou qu de* demo *jiu bei shenshen xiyin, yushi xie xiale geci*).[98] On the Baidu site for the song, the story is as follows:

> JJ Lin wanted to create a song with a story, so he thought of Stefanie Sun. He thought that Stefanie had a very strong appearance, but in her heart, she must certainly have a fragile place, so he called her on the phone and invited her to write the lyrics. The two talked about the concept for the song and he told her that he hoped the song would be titled "She Says." Several days later, Stefanie and JJ met at a PRC event and Stefanie heard the demo for the song. Less than two weeks later, she sent the lyrics to JJ Lin, who personally produced the song.[99]

Regardless of the differences in the details of this story, Stefanie Sun's lyrics, combined with JJ Lin's original melody, are an excellent complement to JJ Lin's wholesome and tender image. Through the course of the song, JJ Lin sings lyrics which portray a "dramatic script written about the emotional world of "her" (*guanyu "ta" xinxu shijie de xiju jiaoben*)[100] and which "show the loneliness of a woman's perspective" (*suozuo geci li nüxing jiaodu de luomo*).[101]

It is clear here that Stefanie Sun's dramatic lyrics were written to highlight the complexities of female emotions in the midst of an ending love. However, the feelings within the song also serve to "make this song's songwriter JJ Lin's "he says" world and Stefanie Sun's "she says" world become one" (*cai rang gaiqu jiang zuoquren Lin Junjie "ta shuo" de shijie he Sun*

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[98] Taihe Music, "JJ Lin Ta Shuo Official Music Video," video, 5:38, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BocMPQv9brE&feature=youtu.be.
[99] "She Says," Creative Background, Baidu, accessed February 5, 2018, https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%A5%B9%E8%AF%B4/581994. Translation by author.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.

Yanzi "ta shuo" de shijie liancheng yipian).[102] This apparently shows "the original intent of the song" (*gequ chuangzuo de benyi*).[103] It is particularly interesting that the combination of both perspectives is the most important element that reveals the original intent. This indicates that JJ Lin and Stefanie Sun wanted the song to be relatable for both male and female listeners. Since the pronoun used in the title of the song is ambiguous when spoken out loud, it could be interpreted by potential listeners as either "he" or "she," thus justifying both genders in feeling the emotions described in the song. Because this was "the original intent of the song," this reveals that the socially acceptable emotional responses of both genders to heartbreak could be the same. When PRC listeners chose to embrace these intentions, "Ta Shuo" subsequently entered into the complex contemporary PRC societal conversation about similarities between genders, as well as appropriate male and female emotional responses to love. The ability for "Ta Shuo" to encompass both the male and female emotional world is a powerful statement to make, especially in a song that is in sung for consumers in a country which only a few decades ago promoted gender sameness, followed by embracing male-dominated rock music.

In writing "Ta Shuo," JJ Lin and Stefanie Sun had to carefully select their lyrics and melody, since the song was primarily meant to be heard and not read, but they still needed the audience to understand its deeply emotional and gendered perspective. Especially in an industry such as popular music where mass mediation via radio and the internet triumphs over printed notation as the primary mode of transmission, it was important for the pair to carefully select lyrics to convey the meaning to listeners. However, Lin and his music video director also use visual cues to indicate the gender identity of the subject of the lyrics to the songs through the

[102] "She Says," Creative Background, Baidu, accessed February 5, 2018, https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%A5%B9%E8%AF%B4/581994. Translation by author.
[103] Ibid.

official music video. One of the first things that I discovered while living on a college campus in Beijing, and which was confirmed again through my ethnographic investigations in Shanghai and Beijing, is the immense popularity of music videos in the Mandopop industry (and more broadly, much of the popular music culture in East Asia). The acronym "MV," which I soon discovered was short for "music video," is one of the many acronyms that can be heard frequently in daily conversation among students in my generation. While an in-depth investigation of the social significance of the use of such acronyms is not within the scope of this project, it is important to note that the acronyms are generally for objects associated with technological development, modernity, and Western products. For example, some common acronyms include "PPT," "MV," "APP," or "UGG," all of which are pronounced using their English letter name equivalents instead of as a complete word, as in the cases of the English pronunciation of "app" as the first part of the word "application" or the brand of boots known as "Uggs." It became clear to me quite quickly during my time in Beijing and Shanghai that these acronyms belonged to the spoken and written Mandarin of the younger generations, whose lives have been dramatically altered by capitalism, technological innovations, and contact with Western luxury brands. Thus, the "MVs" associated with Mandopop represent not only the Mandopop song and artist, but also carry ideas of technology and modernity, such that for audiences, watching and talking about MVs is a way to express modernity and identity.

JJ Lin and many other Mandopop artists have seized the opportunity presented by the mass availability and use of smart devices in the PRC by creating music videos to accompany each of their songs. These videos, available both on the Chinese-language and English-language internet, as well as in Japanese, Korean, and other languages, have huge amounts of views, indicating their importance as a means for learning songs and keeping up with one's favorite

artist. The official music video for JJ Lin's "Ta Shuo," directed by female director Fu Tianyu, currently has over five million views on one YouTube site alone,[104] with many more on YouKu and QQ Music. In this music video, JJ Lin stars as a convenience store worker who has fallen in love with a young female artist who visits his store. The actress in the video, Jian Manshu – a Taiwanese actress and director – portrays the aforementioned artist who is the subject of Lin's affections but is already attached to another man. However, one night she discovers he is seeing another woman, which breaks her heart. She screams and runs through the streets away from his house, ending up back at the convenience store, where she sits alone crying by the window. Finally, JJ Lin approaches her with a free hot drink and sits down beside her to show his support. This touching ending to the story is made even stronger by the text which he speaks after the end of the last lyrics have been sung.

> If someone asked me what type of songs I would like to write, I would respond with this: I hope I can write a type of song for a girl who enters a convenience store late at night after just being broken up with when her feelings are very sad. Then, from the broadcast system in the store, she hears a song which describes her feelings and makes her feel that she isn't alone, but instead there are people who hear the voice coming from her heart. I want to write that kind of song.[105]

Throughout the music video, we see JJ Lin's wholesome and compassionate character brought out vividly through his actions, such as diligently restocking shelves, carefully sweeping,

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[104] The official video can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BocMPQv9brE&feature=youtu.be. Other versions of the same music video, either with the addition of subtitles or translations, can be found at many different YouTube links, which also have several million more views.

[105] Taihe Music, "JJ Lin Ta Shuo Official Music Video," video, 5:38, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BocMPQv9brE&feature=youtu.be. Translation by author.

watching his crush with a tender smile, and celebrating with her in the store when her artwork is selected for publication. However, we could easily imagine the situation with the two genders reversed as well. It would not be surprising for a woman working at a convenience store to fall in love with a male customer, who is later broken up with and comes back to the store, where he is comforted by the same employee. This is one of the biggest points of the song, since it reveals that love is something which affects people of all gender identities. In addition, even if the song were only ever considered from the perspective portrayed in the music video, we can still clearly see the emotional range of both men and women. In the video, the young woman demonstrates everything from excitement to rage, while male employee's emotions range from a crush to the gentle, loving spirit of someone trying to help a hurting soul. Audiences in the PRC who chose to support this music thus see this wider range of emotional expressions across multiple gender identities and are receptive to this creativity.

The director's careful selection of JJ Lin's clothing for this music video also highlights the tender nature of the male character in this scenario. He works at a store named "Family Mart," whose name alone adds to the wholesome quality he is portraying, but the bright green and blue employee uniform also adds a hint of innocence to his image. In the scenes which feature JJ Lin as himself playing the piano, he is also wearing a very stylish gray and white tailored suit, while his hair hangs down in front of his face and his eyes are either looking down or off into the distance longingly. These details are also easily transferable to images of a tender woman who is wearing bright colors, working in a customer service job, and playing music longingly while thinking about someone she loves or misses. This is one of the most important points which JJ Lin and Stefanie Sun hoped to highlight through the creation of the song, which

was even more effectively portrayed with the help of female director Fu Tianyu through their music video.

In order to fully understand "Ta Shuo," we must also examine what remains of this emotional affect when the video is removed from the song. Since it is quite common to listen to the song without any sort of visual aid (on the radio, QQ Music, iTunes, etc.), the auditory methods of conveying these emotions are equally as important. One of the ways in which the song creates this powerful setup of love, heartbreak, and tenderness is through JJ Lin's style of singing and the piano melody that he composed. As soon as the first lyrics are uttered, it is obvious that he is singing carefully and tenderly. His voice is soft and reflective, with a very breathy sighing quality, as if thinking back on a distant memory or something he could never have. The song ends in a similar way, with the last lines repeated and delivered in a ritardando that adds drama and returns to the original mood. In the middle of the song, however, emotions are much more intense, so the dynamics of the accompaniment increase, while the texture also thickens. At time stamp 2:11,[106] a cello enters the soundscape to add an element of reflectiveness to the bridge, but then fades out for the chorus. At 3:09, the cello enters again, followed shortly thereafter by a violin, which then plays a duet with the cello; these two instruments reflect the emotions of the two characters in the video, where the violin reflects the woman's pain as she realizes her boyfriend is with another woman and the cello provides support with its low chord tones.

Finally, as is highlighted on the song's Baidu page, "As soon as the melody of JJ Lin's "Remember" is heard in the middle of the song, it makes the love that the song elaborates even

[106] All time stamps are in reference to the official Taihe Records YouTube music video. Taihe Music, "JJ Lin Ta Shuo Official Music Video," video, 5:38, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BocMPQv9brE&feature=youtu.be.

more turbulent and poignant."[107] This occurs at 1:59 in the official "Ta Shuo" music video and provides the background music as JJ Lin, acting as the store clerk, watches the surveillance cameras for the store as he sits and thinks about the girl he has fallen in love with. This melody, a clear use of the chorus of "Remember" (which will be discussed later in the chapter), serves as one way that JJ Lin ties the album together and adds to the emotional impact for the listener. Finally, after the young woman returns to the store, the cello and violin duet switches to a rhythmic unison with longer note values than before, allowing the scene to feel a sense of rest and adding to the tenderness of the moment when JJ Lin gives the woman a free drink and sits with her. All of these musical cues add to the dramatic nature of the song, heightening the emotions for both main actors and allowing the listener to more deeply feel the mood of the song.

Finding "She" in "She Says"

Through both the previously discussed musical cues and the visual cues embedded in the music video, JJ Lin solidifies "Ta Shuo"'s role in demonstrating the powerful emotions of love, both from the male and female perspective. This is an important change from the industry that Moskowitz discusses, wherein women sing songs about men written by men, which situate women as dependent and overly emotional, while men are typically the objects of desire who have the power to end the relationship. Instead, JJ Lin's music and Stefanie Sun's lyrics work together to flip this paradigm around, using both the obvious portrayal of both his desire for the customer and the customer's breakup as sources of emotion which are legitimate for both males

[107] "She Says," Creative Background, Baidu, accessed February 5, 2018, https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%A5%B9%E8%AF%B4/581994.

and females. The lyrics of this song also make careful use of the third-person pronoun *ta* in Mandarin, which is pronounced the same way for both "he" and "she."

In order to understand the use of *ta* in the lyrics of both the song "Ta Shuo" and the broader implications of its use as the title of the album, we must first examine an outline of the development of gendered pronouns in spoken and written Mandarin. In contemporary usage in the PRC, the first-tone spoken syllable *ta* is used to represent "he," "she," and "it." This pronoun can be combined with the plural suffix "-men" to indicate third-person plural, just as can the first-person pronoun *wo* (I/me) and the second-person pronoun *ni* (you). As in many other languages, such as Spanish, a group of people of multiple genders who are referenced in the third-person are described using the "he" form of *ta* combined with the plural suffix "-*men*," meaning that 他们 can either refer to a group of multiple men or a group of people with different gender identities. The female form 她们 (they, female) and the inanimate object form 它们 (they, objects) are used only to refer to groups which are entirely female or entirely inanimate objects. In the present, this can reveal a subtle trend toward placing higher priority on males in mixed groups than females. However, this was not always historically the case with regards to personal pronouns. Most importantly, the written difference between "he," "she," and "it" was not introduced in Chinese characters until after contact with the West. As Daniel Kane discusses, during the first half of the twentieth century, there was also a movement to introduce separate pronunciations (and new characters) to differentiate between male and female pronouns.[108] The use of the syllables *yi* for "she" (with the accompanying character 伊) and *tuo* for "it" (它) instead of *ta* would seem to solve the homophone dilemma which can prove to be complicated for native speakers, but even harder for nonnative speakers to understand. However, the

[108] Daniel Kane, *The Chinese Language: Its History and Current Usage* (Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2007), 107.

implementation of these new characters and pronunciations for pronouns was not successful in practice, since the language was already deeply engrained in society and it remained most natural to resort to *ta*.[109] Now, because the pronunciations remain the same, the other words used to describe *ta* retain their importance in identifying gender. In fact, because of the complication in figuring out gender identity when using these personal pronouns, it has become more common to use the person's name instead. There is also a recent trend that has accompanied the increase in social media dialogue about nonbinary gender identities, which reveals that some people are switching to inputting the actual letters "ta" in Pinyin instead of selecting a character for "he" or "she."[110] The first instances of this trend date to the time of the popularity of *Renren*, one of the many Facebook-esque platforms in the PRC.[111] It is particularly interesting that people discussing nonbinary identities feel the need to resort to phonetic alphabet transcription instead of characters for a genderless term. The use of the letters "ta" to represent the equivalent of he/she in English has become popular through social media, as well as subtitles of videos on the internet and a television show in Taiwan titled "TA 们说" which discusses LGBT issues.[112] This solution is just one option, but as previously discussed in Chapter 2, some artists are creating other genderless terms such as *meishaonian* to express their personal identities. While personal pronoun usage in Mandarin is less frequent than in English (and one of the overused features of

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[109] Daniel Kane, *The Chinese Language: Its History and Current Usage* (Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2007), 107.
[110] Victor Mair, "A Gender-Neutral Pronoun (Re)emerges in China," *Slate*, December 26, 2013, http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon_valley/2013/12/26/mandarin_chinese_a_gender_neutral_pronoun_meaning_he_she_or_it_gains_traction.html.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Victor Mair, "The Degendering of the Third Person Pronoun in Mandarin, Pt. 2," UPenn Language Log, October 16, 2017, http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=35005. See also: Victor Mair, "Roman-Letter Mandarin Pronoun of Indeterminate Gender," UPenn Language Log, August 9, 2016, http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=27280.

essays written by students of Mandarin),[113] it is still important to consider this issue particularly in the case of JJ Lin's album which uses *ta* as one of its primary identifiers.

JJ Lin and the lyricists included within his album, as native speakers of Mandarin, are all certainly aware of these gender dynamics implicit in Mandarin communication. In order to make the lyrics of these songs effective to the public, they had to carefully select words and imagery which would communicate the gender identity they were referencing. In the album title *Ta Shuo*, there is little room for detail and essentially no way to distinguish "he" from "she" without seeing the title in Chinese characters. However, once a listener heard the song "Ta Shuo" from the album, the connection with the female usage "She Says" became immediately clear for the title track and for the overall album.

One of the most interesting results of my ethnographic work in Shanghai and Beijing was to gather opinions on which aspects of the song reveal the female pronoun usage as opposed to the male usage. Since this album, and particularly the title track, were one of the primary impetuses of my fieldwork, I focused on asking people who were familiar with JJ Lin's version of the song to explain why they knew it referred to "she" and, if someone was unfamiliar with the song, to play it for them and ask them to tell me when they knew which gender identity the lyrics referenced. Their answers, some of which will be discussed below, combine with my own outsider analysis to create a deeper understanding of how Stefanie Sun's lyrics and JJ Lin's performance contribute to a gendered reading of the contents of "Ta Shuo."

After reviewing the data that I collected during my ethnographic work, it became clear to me that the most obvious indicator that this song was about "she" was hearing it sung by JJ Lin's male voice. One of the questions that I asked interviewees was if they thought that the gender of

[113] Chaofen Sun, *Chinese: A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 166-167.

the singer or the songwriter had more influence on any given song. Out of the several dozen people that I surveyed, only three responded that the gender of the songwriter had more influence on the song, with one of those responding with a less-than-compelling "maybe the songwriter?"[114] On the other hand, for those that responded that the singer's gender had more impact, their responses were more frequently definitive, with one person even responding that the determining factor was "absolutely the singer!"[115] In the case of JJ Lin's recording of "Ta Shuo," his voice makes it clear from the beginning that the song is sung from a male perspective talking about a woman whom he loves. This correlation makes sense, considering the history of the Mandarin-language popular music industry, where it is quite common for women to sing songs about men (or, more broadly, to sing about the opposite gender). In the case of JJ Lin, the singer is a man, so it is logical for listeners to assume the typical heterosexual relationship between the singer and the subject of the lyrics but substitute for a male singer and a female subject, instead of assuming it would be a man singing about or to a man. Considering that the phenomenon of homosexuality also still faces significant social stigmas in the PRC, it is also reasonable that listeners would not immediately conclude that the lyrics were a male singing to a male. Because the societal norms with regards to gender and sexual orientation in the PRC began to change after Taiwan and Hong Kong had already begun to embrace this diversity, it follows that the Mandopop industry stars who market their music to a PRC audience are still striving to achieve acceptance in this area.

In addition to JJ Lin's male voice which marks the song as directed from a man to a woman, the lyrics of "Ta Shuo" also include some phrases which mark it with "she" instead of

[114] Li Hong, WeChat interview with author, Beijing, May 12, 2017. Translation by author.
[115] Wang Yiran, interview with author, Shanghai, May 10, 2017. Translation by author.

"he." Before I explore examples of this language, I will first present a transcription and my translation of the lyrics of JJ Lin's "Ta Shuo."

"Ta Shuo" by JJ Lin and Stefanie Sun

She came silently
She slowly took away the silence
But the final promise
Still did not take away the loneliness
There was nothing wrong with our love
It is just that the beauty of standing alone is too torturous
She said it doesn't matter
As long as there is some sustenance while I toss and turn at night
If you don't wait until dark, the fireworks can't be as perfect
As the memories are burnt, there is still no ending
I'm scared that day by day she is forgetting that she said, "it doesn't matter"[116]

In addition to JJ Lin's vocal impact, Stefanie Sun's lyrics contain many descriptive phrases which contribute to the emotional impact of "Ta Shuo." After analyzing the results of my interviews, I discovered a few key phrases which listeners thought of as particularly indicative of *ta* being female in the song. One of the most common answers was the use of *jing qiaoqiao de laiguo* in the opening line of the song, which one response described as referring to a woman because "women are more often referred to as quiet."[117] This is an interesting response, since it indicates a social stereotype for women to be quieter than men, but also an implication that women are smaller, gentler, and more likely to be silent. In a society which previously confined women to the *nei* (inner) sphere, it is not surprising to find a persistence of stereotypes which place women in less dominating/intimidating positions. A similar response was that the second

[116] Original Chinese lyrics removed due to copyright. Lyrics are taken from: Taihe Music, "JJ Lin Ta Shuo Official Music Video," video, 5:38, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BocMPQv9brE&feature=youtu.be. Translation by author.
[117] Zhou Ying, interview with author, Shanghai, May 12, 2017. Translation by author.

line, which describes the subject as "slowly taking away the silence," was more likely to refer to a woman, because women were "more careful and gentle,"[118] so they would be apt to do something slowly and tenderly.

While these responses provide some insight into why listeners might interpret the song as referring to a female, it is also important to note that many interviewees paused for a long time to think about this question and some were completely unable to think of a response other than "I don't know." Clearly the lyrics provide a complicated background, as they bring to mind some societal stereotypes about what women should be (or what women usually are), in contrast to men. However, there are many lines within the song which could just as easily be applied to a "he" subject instead of a "she" subject. Particularly as the PRC audience increases its embrace of nonbinary identities, androgyny, and *wenrou* males (as discussed in Chapter 2), it is important to note the ability of these lyrics to be reversed for "he says." As this becomes more applicable (and acceptable) for many listeners and fans, the lyrics prove their ability to multitask. In fact, some listeners have already transcribed the lyrics to "he" instead of "she" in parts of the song for their personal use and distribution on social media.[119] This illustrates the increasing social acceptance of flexibility in gender roles, which is what JJ Lin and Stefanie Sun hoped to highlight and legitimate through the song's lyrics. The combination of Stefanie Sun's lyrics, JJ Lin's male voice, and their collective intention to capture an emotional world which is relatable for both "he" and "she" reveals that the Mandopop industry is one of the inspirational forces in the societal shift toward gender diversity and social acceptance.

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[118] Wang Yiran, interview with author, Shanghai, May 10, 2017. Translation by author.

[119] For example, the gender is swapped in the Chinese and English lyrics for the first verse on the following site. "Pinyin and English Lyrics, JJ Lin Ta Shuo," last modified May 2, 2015, accessed January 28, 2018, https://jspinyin.wordpress.com/2015/05/02/pinyinenglish-lyrics-jj-lin-%E6%9E%97%E4%BF%8A%E5%82%91-%E5%A5%B9%E8%AA%AA-ta-shuo-she-says/.

"Remember"

As previously mentioned, about halfway through the music video for JJ Lin's "Ta Shuo," he borrows the melody from another song on the album to create an even more dramatic emotional moment. In the "Ta Shuo" music video, we see both JJ Lin acting as the store employee watching the security monitors and thinking about the woman he loves, and, shortly thereafter, JJ Lin playing the quoted melody on the piano. This melody is taken from the chorus of his song "Ji De" ("Remember"), which is also on the *Ta Shuo* album. In order to fully understand the importance of this musical quote in foreshadowing the next portion of "Ta Shuo," we must first examine the lyrics of the chorus of "Ji De."

"Ji De" by JJ Lin and Kevin Yi (*Yi Jiayang*)[120]

Who still remembers who was the first to say they will always love me?
This sentence from the past is now our future wound
It's been too long and there is no one who remembers the tenderness of that time
Me and you hand in hand, said we would be together to the very end

This is a song which fits well within the Mandopop angst-ridden love song trend that Moskowitz describes. The song depicts one member of a couple who recently broke up, who is reflecting on the pain of saying "I love you," as well as wondering if they should regret the love that they shared. None of the lyrics in the song have any gender identity explicitly stated, but it would not be surprising given Moskowitz's argument for us to expect these lyrics to be written by a man and performed by a woman, who is singing about the man with whom she still wishes

[120]Original Chinese lyrics removed due to copyright. Lyrics taken from: "Ji De by A-Mei, 2010 Cover by JJ Lin," last modified February 11, 2011, accessed January 26, 2018, https://ktvxiaojie.wordpress.com/2011/02/11/ji-dea-mei-recent-cover-by-%E6%9E%97%E4%BF%8A%E5%82%91-jj-lin/. Translation by author.

to be in a relationship. This suspicion is confirmed by the fact that JJ Lin and male lyricist Kevin Yi originally wrote the melody and words of the song for famous Taiwanese singer A-Mei in 2001. A-Mei's version is still quite famous and is frequently heard on Taiwanese idol shows or at karaoke venues, but JJ Lin's own cover of the song increased its popularity even further. Here we find again the phenomenon of a song which is sung by both male and female singers to the same audience. In the case of a female singer, the lyrics become reflective of a heartbroken woman who can easily be construed as weak and desperate without her ex-boyfriend. However, in the case of a male singer, the lyrics make him appear more tender than we would usually imagine a man to be in the Mandopop lyrical world. JJ Lin's willingness to cover this song, thus portraying himself as more emotionally vulnerable and tender, reveals two different possibilities.

One possibility which cannot be denied is that he could simply be undertaking this as a commercial venture, since the market has clearly demonstrated in recent years that women are becoming increasingly interested in men who are tender (as discussed in previous chapters). In this case, JJ Lin realized that he could appeal to women by making them feel that men understand their emotions, as one interviewee highlighted. She remarked that JJ Lin's album made her feel that "sometimes men are more likely to understand women than women are to understand themselves."[121] This trend highlights the increasing market value of male singers who can demonstrate their emotional vulnerability and can relate to women's emotions, thus bridging any sort of supposed gap which societal expectations put between the emotions of males and females.

However, it is also probable that JJ Lin decided to cover this song, making himself emotionally vulnerable and tender, to contribute to the overall theme and purpose of his album.

[121] Wang Yiran, interview with author, Shanghai, May 10, 2017. Translation by author.

As his collaboration with Stefanie Sun to create "Ta Shuo" demonstrates, JJ Lin was interested in writing music and compiling an album that would allow both men and women to relate to its contents. In creating his own cover of "Ji De," he employs the same principles that were used in "Ta Shuo" when he blurs the line of what emotions are acceptable for men and women to feel and allows his audience to see (and hear) male emotions other than strength, confidence, or anger. Instead, the lyrics are reflective and sad, which is compounded by the tenderness of his voice. In the music video, JJ Lin receives a breakup letter from his ex-girlfriend and when he reads it, he is so upset that he even drops his coffee mug, which shatters on the floor. It is this deep emotional vulnerability that makes JJ Lin's cover so relatable for women who have been in the same position, as well as for men. However, it is also worth noting that he gives the powerful role of the breakup letter writer to a woman; this allows women to feel justified in wanting to end a relationship, as well as giving women more power in causing a man to feel vulnerable. It reflects that both parties in an ended relationship deal with emotional pain, which is frequently ignored or scorned in males, but here is embraced through JJ Lin's cover. By choosing to consume this music, PRC audiences have demonstrated that they are receptive to this creativity in the domain of gender.

Within the context of "Ta Shuo," JJ Lin's quote of the melody of the chorus from "Ji De" can be understood as an artistic moment of foreshadowing. The quote is long enough to clearly convey the chorus of "Ji De." The lyrics of the chorus, which it then draws to mind, discuss pain caused by a breakup; this foreshadows the breakup which is soon to happen between the girl JJ Lin loves and the boy whom she discovers is cheating on her. Quoting his own material in this way unites the two songs into the same emotional realm and intensifies the emotional impact of the breakup in "Ta Shuo." Throughout his *Ta Shuo* album, JJ Lin continually returns to the idea

of male tenderness, as well as creating a world which reminds listeners that both men and women can understand the same emotions about love. For his PRC Mandopop audience, this marks a point which helps his female audience feel that he understands them, while simultaneously giving voice and agency to males who have had to hide these emotions or express them in more stereotypically masculine ways.

JJ Lin's *Ta Shuo* in Context

As anyone familiar with the Mandopop industry would be quick to (correctly) point out, this phenomenon of a male singer creating a cover of a song originally performed by a woman (or vice versa) is not unique to JJ Lin. In fact, as one of my interviewees immediately reminded me when I started asking her questions, "You know, a lot of songs have cover versions which are performed by singers of the other gender."[122] However, some of her later comments actually help to elucidate why JJ Lin's album is particularly special in what it does with regard to gender ideologies. When I asked her what she thought differentiated males as typically portrayed in Mandopop from females (if anything), she was quick to describe women as "vulnerable and heart-broken"[123] while men were "tough and cool, but sometimes they could be a little nostalgic."[124] Another interviewee described women as "always complaining about their past love and how they can't get away from it"[125] and men as "neutral or extroverted."[126] These responses are by no means the full list of adjectives which could be used to characterize male and female roles in a stereotypical Mandopop song, but they prove the point that there still exist

[122] Liang Wenjing, interview with author, Shanghai, May 7, 2017. Translation by author.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Hua Ningjing, interview with author, Shanghai, May 8, 2017. Translation by author.
[126] Ibid.

societal expectations which differ for men and women as expressed in Mandopop. JJ Lin's covers, which were an intentionally compiled collection of materials that were originally for female singers but reversed for himself to sing, reveal his careful effort to lead a societal shift away from these gendered expectations to allow more freedom for both men and women to express their emotions openly. As the audience in the PRC chooses to conspicuously consume JJ Lin's music, they also demonstrate their receptiveness to this experimentation with gender expression.

Conclusions

Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted some of the ways in which PRC Mandopop does just that; in many ways, the cultural product of popular music in the PRC has and continues to reveal new societal norms related to gender identity. This thesis has demonstrated that the post-1997 Mandopop music industry in the PRC has evolved in dramatic ways to incorporate gender identities which are new, creative, and represent a social and cultural shift in PRC understandings of self-expression.

Because of the influences of capitalism, technology, and increased access to foreign media, the PRC market is now the site of several gender "types" which demonstrate artists' use of music as a domain of individual creativity. When artists such as Joey Yung actively portray their female sexuality, or when duets like Kissy assert their cuteness, we can clearly see the broadened range of identities that are created by PRC artists and conspicuously consumed by PRC audiences. Analysis of the diverse portrayals of femininity and androgyny in girl bands ranging from SNH48 to FFC-Acrush further suggests that the PRC Mandopop market embraces a spectrum of gender identities. Fans of these groups financially support their development, as they find their own feelings and identities reflected in the sounds and images associated with their favorite stars. For boy bands, also, who choose to portray more tender masculinities, they find female fans who are very receptive to singers such as Roy Wang of TFBoys, whose lyrics they feel speak to them personally. Finally, after examining PRC audience reactions to creative gender expressions in Mandopop through a case study of JJ Lin's *Ta Shuo*, I have demonstrated that there is increasing fluidity between the hypermasculine and hyperfeminine ends of the gender spectrum, which is evident in language usage and in music, and most importantly, that is positively received by PRC consumers. The changes in the contemporary PRC music industry

are allowing and encouraging artists to adopt Mandopop as their domain of gender creativity, while also giving fans space to express their own personal identities through the voices of their favorite stars.

The agency of PRC artists and audiences in creating and consuming contemporary Mandopop is clearly demonstrated within this thesis; however, discussions of this agency are not foregrounded in current scholarship on the field. Instead, we find ourselves in an unusual era of scholarship in which there is much writing about Taiwanese music's importance to PRC audiences, but which also provides the impression that the PRC is nothing more than a bystander in the production of its own culture. Understandably, this increasing focus on Taiwanese music in the PRC is a much-needed response to the previous lack of scholarship on Taiwan. As recently as a decade ago, the field of Taiwan studies was little known or recognized within academia, as it was overshadowed by studies of the PRC. However, this trend is beginning to dissipate as scholars of Taiwan are gaining recognition for their bold forays into highly politicized discussions of an environment of complex languages, rituals, history, and culture. For example, Moskowitz's findings are fundamentally important to the field because they attempt to shore up scholarly understanding of Taiwanese music in the PRC; however, in trying to compensate for this lack of scholarship, readers are left with the impression that "the tail (Taiwan) is always wagging the dog (PRC)," as Moskowitz argues. In other words, we arrive at the conclusion that Taiwan dominates cultural production as a cultural center, while the PRC – larger in terms of geography, population, and political/military power – is simply the recipient and is relegated to the status of a cultural periphery. It is relatively easy to understand why scholars might arrive at this conclusion, particularly following the relocation of the *shidaiqu* industry (early 1930s and 1940s Shanghai popular music in Mandarin) to Taiwan and Hong Kong during the Socialist era

and in light of the continued dominance of Taiwanese record labels and artists since that time. However, this one-dimensional understanding of the flow of culture between Taiwan and the PRC leaves us with no conception of what Taiwanese music means to people in Taiwan or how the PRC leaves its own cultural (as well as political, social, economic, and historical) traces on Mandopop.

In calling for a reassessment of the concept of individual creativity in Mandopop in the late capitalist PRC, this thesis asserts that scholarship on Chinese popular music must return long overdue agency to PRC Mandopop artists and consumers who live in a society which has moved away from its collectivistic history into an era in which individualism is increasingly recognized and valued. While Taiwan and Hong Kong may still be the primary centers of popular culture production for the PRC, it is clear that the PRC is not an idle bystander in the process of understanding and reshaping Mandopop. The PRC influence on Mandopop is one which is directly related to the historical, political, social, and economic factors which have shaped the PRC, and which I argue will continue to have significant ramifications for PRC culture and social norms related to gender identity in the future.

Over the course of the 2000s and 2010s, the sounds of the PRC's different and ever-evolving gender identities have become increasingly represented in the Mandopop mainstream; I believe that this trend will continue as PRC society further embraces late capitalist economics and social development, with Mandopop situated as a field of gender creativity which is on the cutting edge. Like Nancy Guy in her analysis of Taiwanese popular music in the 1990s, I do not propose that the current condition of gender creativity in PRC Mandopop exhibits a "cause-effect paradigm" wherein Mandopop is leading social changes and society is following the music's outline, but I do believe that popular musicians of the post-1997 PRC "give voice to new ways of

conceptualizing and understanding" gender in the PRC.[127] When fans travel from places such as Inner Mongolia to Beijing or Shanghai to attend an FFC-Acrush concert, they are expressing their financial and personal dedication to the values expressed in Acrush's music; some fans look up to the performers as idols, while others relate to their gender performance. In creating new terminology to discuss (or avoid discussing) gender identities, as well as actively promoting an image which was previously outside the mainstream for cisgender females in Chinese history, FFC-Acrush gives voice and legitimacy to androgyny, as well as an outlet to fans who share the same gender identity. This is also true for female fans who identify more with the *ke'ai* or *lamei* expressions of femininity that are so common in PRC Mandopop. For these women, it is equally as important to see their own gender expression represented on a national and global scale, thus affirming their legitimacy and cultural importance. As a widening variety of gender identities are brought to the forefront of the PRC Mandopop music industry and listeners across the globe consume these identities through the music, it is of paramount importance that scholars of Mandopop continue to reexamine the societal changes which accompany musical shifts and restore agency to PRC artists and consumers who facilitate these changes.

Further Research

While this thesis has attempted to address some of the most pressing gaps in relationship to PRC Mandopop, many questions fall beyond the scope of the project. Research into developments in agency, gender identity, economics, and other PRC-specific cultural conditions and their relationships with Mandopop has the potential to be expanded much further to investigate questions ranging from political studies to identity studies. One of the most pressing

[127] Nancy Guy, "How Does 'Made in Taiwan' Sound? Popular Music and Strategizing the Sounds of a Multicultural Nation," *Perfect Beat* 5, no. 3 (July 2001): 11.

questions I encountered but lacked the tools (and space) to fully address within this thesis is the issue of defining "Chineseness." When I decided to refer to China by the name "the PRC" because of the political implications surrounding many of the other options, I also encountered the dilemma of whether it was acceptable to describe something as "Chinese." For example, referring to "Chinese culture" then begs the question of which areas and which peoples adhere to this culture. Within this thesis, I continued to use the modified "Chinese" in spite of this issue; however, in the future, it is important to address (as much as is possible) the complexities bound up in the qualification of culture, history, or people as "Chinese." In order to fully address the question of who or what is "Chinese" both in terms of artists and audiences, much more ethnographic fieldwork is required.

Another question that remains unanswered by this thesis is the extent to which the "dog wags the tail" (i.e., how much cultural influence PRC Mandopop has in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the rest of the Chinese-speaking world). In order to fully understand the transnationality of the Mandopop industry in contemporary East Asia (and around the globe), we must further investigate the intricacies of this flow of popular music and culture. While it remains clear that the influence of PRC Mandopop on Taiwan and the broader Chinese-speaking world is less powerful than that of Taiwan's influence, the relative degrees of influence are not yet fully understood.

While many of the questions posed within this project and those mentioned above are too broad for any single researcher to address, it is of paramount importance that as the field of Mandopop research progresses, we begin to take into account many of these nuances. In order to arrive at a well-founded knowledge of the Mandopop industry and its audience, scholars must

broaden their understandings of the complex economic, political, social, and historical traits of the PRC, Taiwan, and the Chinese-speaking world.

Appendix 1: Figures

1. *Left*, Joey Yung on the cover of Cosmopolitan Magazine, Hong Kong, April 2016. http://www.famousfix.com/topic/cosmopolitan-magazine-hong-kong-april-2016, accessed February 19, 2018. *Right,* Joey Yung on the cover of ELLE Magazine, November 2017. https://www.facebook.com/yungjoey/posts/1504190379647973, accessed February 19, 2018.
2. Billboard for Joey Yung's 2013 Hong Kong tour advertising her album Little Day. Photo by Chen Man. http://joeyyung.wikia.com/wiki/Ageas_Joey_Yung_in_Concert_1314, accessed November 29, 2017.
3. The women of SNH48's Team SII, displayed on the "Members" section of the group's website. http://www.snh48.com/member_details.html?sid=10001, accessed December 23, 2017.
4. FFC-Acrush group photo, Instagram, March 30, 2017. https://www.instagram.com/p/BSQqR48jemw/?hl=en&taken-by=ffc_acrush, accessed February 19, 2018.
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Appendix 2: Interview Questions

1. How frequently do you listen to Mandopop?
2. What media do you use to listen to Mandopop?
3. Have you ever listened to JJ Lin's "Ta Shuo" or another song from that album?
4. Can you tell me how you knew it referred to "she" instead of "he?"
5. Does this song tell you anything about gender or social norms in Chinese society?
6. Do you think that Mandopop contributes to the formation of Chinese people's cultural identities? Has it contributed to your own identity?
7. When you listen to Mandopop, do you think about the gender of the singer or songwriter?
8. Do you think that the gender of the songwriter influences the songs more or less than the gender of the singer?
9. Are there any specific lyrics (or songs or artists) that give you ideas about gender?
10. Who are your favorite Mandopop artists (list both singers and songwriters)?
11. What words would you use to describe women in Mandopop lyrics?
12. What words would you use to describe female Mandopop performers?
13. What words would you use to describe men in Mandopop lyrics?
14. What words would you use to describe male Mandopop performers?
15. Do you think that it is appropriate for a man to write a song for a woman to sing? Do you know the history of this practice?
16. Do you think that Mandopop influences how people think about gender or how different genders should act? If so, how?
17. If Mandopop songs were written by females for males to perform, how do you think this would change the contents of the lyrics?

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