Homoeroticising Archaic Wind Music: A Rhizomatic Return to Ancient China

YIWEN WANG

ABSTRACT: This article explores Archaic Wind music (*gufeng* 古風) and its implications for Sinophone articulations. *Gufeng* can be categorised as a particular type of music with lyrical, musical, and symbolic references to ancient China that is produced, consumed, and circulated within an online fan community. While the lyrics of *gufeng* music express a post-loyalist yearning to return to the fictional roots of "Cultural China," its video adaptations deconstruct the authenticity of such cultural roots in their homoerotic subtext. Exploring the audio-visual texts of the *gufeng* music, I suggest that it shows a rhizomatic return to ancient China that disorients the routes to the past.

KEYWORDS: Archaic Wind (*gufeng*) music; China Wind music; Boy Love; online fan community; Chineseness.

Introduction: Gravitating towards the Archaic Wind

Online cultural production in the Chinese-speaking community emerged in the 1990s when both Hong Kong and Taiwan connected to the Internet in 1991 and mainland China connected in 1994 (Zhao, Yang, and Lavin 2017: xvii). Widespread Internet connectivity has brought a concomitant influx of Japanese anime and manga dominated by the motif of male-male homoerotic romance, termed *danmei* 耽美, which was imported to mainland China between 1991 and 1992 via Taiwan (Feng 2013: 55-6). In Chinese-language Internet literature, *danmei* is usually used interchangeably with BL (Boy Love) or *tongren* 同人 (same characters), in works of fan-fiction that display homoerotic romances between male characters, shared mainly on literature websites and forums (Feng 2013), but now also encompassing amateur music videos (MVs) shared on video-streaming websites.

In this context, Archaic Wind (*gufeng* 古風), an Internet-based music genre characterised by its abundance of classical Chinese references (including to the music genre China Wind (*zhongguofeng* 中國風)),[1] has emerged on Chinese-language websites such as 5SING, Baidu Postbar, Sina Microblog, Youku, and Bilibili. *Gufeng* music first appeared in 2005 on the Decibel website (*Fenbeiwang* 分貝網) as cover songs or musical adaptations of the martial arts (*wuxia* 武俠) video game *Chinese Paladin* (*Xianjian Qixia Zhuan* 仙劍奇俠傳) (Zhou and Xiong 2016: 101; Ye 2018: 115). Since then, *gufeng* music has begun to proliferate on the music-sharing website 5SING, where amateur singers, lyric writers, and composers upload their works. The first *gufeng* music band, Momingqimiao 墨明棋妙, was established in 2007 and gradually gained popularity. While the success of Momingqimiao was followed by some popular music bands such as Xiyinshe 汐音社 and Pingshaluoyan 平沙落雁 that had composers able to produce original songs, most *gufeng* music selections are cover songs that amateur fans have produced and online fan communities have circulated. On the Chinese music streaming platform Xiami 蝦米, for instance, several Momingqimiao albums exceed 3 million views – they have published around 47 albums or EPs since 2007.[2]

Characterising itself as a return to ancient China, *gufeng* music can appear to be part of a neo-traditionalist revival in contemporary Chinese society, similar to the Han-clothing trend (*Hanfu* 漢服) that has emerged online since 2001, advocating a revival of Han clothing, a style of traditional clothing believed to have been invented by the Yellow Emperor and worn by ethnic Han Chinese until their conquest by the Manchus during the Qing dynasty (Carrico 2017: 36). The movement is guided by a nationalist project to invent a mythological origin for ethnic Han, and wearing Han clothing is regarded as a ritual of materialising "ancient China" as a symbol of unified Han culture, which draws on imaginary that equates "Chineseness" with "Han-ness" (*ibid.*: 98-9). Carrico (2017) finds that this nationalist movement embodies a misogynist view of gender involving a male-dominated Hanness and Chineseness that can only be found in the glorious past of the Han and Tang dynasties (*ibid.*).[3] Similar to the Hanfu movement, *gufeng* music's thematic concern is dominated by location-oriented imaginings, crystalized around the ancient cities of Luoyang 洛陽 and Chang'an 長安 as synecdoches of Chinese antiquity. However, contrary to the Hanfu movement's patriarchal connotations, femininity is celebrated in *gufeng*

1. China Winds music emerged after 2000 in China. It was initiated by a group of Taiwan-based artists and significantly influenced *gufeng* music. China Winds music is usually produced collaboratively by pop music stars such as Jay Chou, S.H.E, and Wang Leehom and lyricists such as Vincent Fang (Fang Wenshan 方文出), who is considered the genre's most important lyricist (Chow and De Kloet 2010: 70). See also: Chen-Yu Lin, "Relocating the Functions of Chineseness in Chinese Popular Music after the China Wind" in this issue.
2. See: https://www.xiami.com/artist/Gzb547d2 (accessed on 23 March 2020).
3. As a rich cultural phenomenon, the Hanfu performance cannot be exhausted by the nationalist ideology with a misogynist view, and there are Hanfu fans that are reluctant to classify their Hanfu performance as politically charged and female Hanfu performers with feminist consciousnesses. However, as a matter of fact, the Han-centric and male-dominated nationalist discourse predominately exists in the Hanfu movement according to Carrico's field research (Carrico 2017).

music lyrics, as analysed by Jeroen de Kloet and Yiu Fai Chow in the case of China Wind pop, "by rewriting Chinese culture with a female voice and use gender as a means to trouble dominant narratives" (2013: 71). In *gufeng* songs such as "Invisible Chang'an" (*Bujian Chang'an* 不見長安), "Memories of Lin'an" (*Lin'an Jiyi* 臨安記憶), and "Night Rain of Luoyang" (*Luoyang Yeyu* 洛陽夜雨), the lyrics' narrative sets up a connotative equivalent between the ancient cities and either an anonymous beauty who has been separated from her lover due to war or death or a fleeting image that the sojourner fails to locate. Accordingly, the location-based imaginings are feminised through such literary personification as *gufeng* music is transformed from pre-symbolic sound to lyrical expression.

Gufeng music's gender trope further changes from female-centric to BL narrative as the location-based imaginations in the lyrics are adapted to the character-oriented fan MV. The flourishing of *gufeng* music is closely intertwined with the *danmei tongren* trend, as a great amount of *gufeng* music is also derivative in nature with appropriated melodies from martial arts video games such as *Xuanyuan Swords* (1990-present), *Chinese Paladin* (1995), *JX3* (2009), and *Swords of Legends* (2010), all of which are set in ancient China. Two major groups of *tongren* music within the *gufeng* fan community are video game fanfiction (*Youxi tongren* 遊戲同人), which narrates romantic stories between fictional characters in video games, and historical fanfiction (*Lishi tongren* 歷史同人), which depicts homoerotic love between historical figures who are usually heterosexual males. Within the fan community of *Lishi tongren*, there are usually two steps in producing a fan MV: Firstly, lyric writers appropriate the melody from martial arts video games or China Wind music with lyrics narrating a *danmei* romance, and *gufeng* music is finalised by a cover-song singer and post-production editor via MIDI software. Secondly, video editors take *gufeng* music as background music and combine it with footage from TV dramas narrating ancient Chinese history in order to produce the remixed video. This two-step video adaptation brings about a semantic shift from the metaphorical representation of ancient cities *as* female characters to the literal portrayal *of* male characters tied to a fabricated homoerotic subtext. Situated in the fan community, *gufeng* music rearticulates Chineseness not through grand confrontational politics but via appropriational discourse at a micro-level. Such transformative potential lies in the use of *gufeng* music in the *process* of multimedia adaptation from music or cover songs to a music video, rather than as a finalized *product*.

Because *gufeng* is an Internet subculture phenomenon, as Sun (2017) researched, the music itself is not an end product within the fan community because it undergoes further transformations in its video remake. The lyrics of *gufeng* cover songs usually use soundtracks to produce fan music videos, the video remake of a film or TV series that narrates Chinese history. The fan-produced MVs are usually first uploaded to a video-sharing website such as Tudou or Youku and then gradually migrate to Bilibili, a barrage-subtitled website that displays viewers' comments onscreen instead of clustering them in a special comments section (Zheng 2016: 371). The floating comments superimposed on the images, referred to by the fans as "bullet subtitles" (*danmu* 彈幕), not only interpret the corresponding footage but also initiate debates on the videos. As such, *gufeng* music videos on Bilibili form a heterogeneous assemblage of background music, found-footage videos, and viewer-generated comments without being fully integrated into a coherent narrative.

Considering its hybridisation of classical Chinese references and digital technologies, *gufeng* music's definition has triggered scholarly debate. He Shiru, Hou Dongyi, Yao Tingting, and Ye Shuyang explore the lyrical aspect of *gufeng* music and define it as an intertextual reference to the cultural products of premodern China, either by directly incorporating specific Chinese classics into the lyrics; adapting such classics as canons, myths, or legends; or appropriating the motifs or recurrent symbols of classical Chinese literature into their original writings (Hou 2015: 105; He 2017: 85; Yao 2017: 124-6; Ye 2018). Yao Tingting and Jin Shasha investigate the melodic component of *gufeng* music and suggest that it usually adopts the five-note scale of Chinese traditional music, namely, 宮 (do), 商 (re), 角 (mi), 徵 (sol), 羽 (la), and in rare cases, employs the six-note scale by adding modified tones such as *qingjiao* 清角, *bianzhi* 變徵, *biangong* 變宮, or *run* 閏 (Jin 2014: 117; Yao 2016: 44). Xue Dongyan, Tujin Mei, and Zhou Hangyu define *gufeng* in terms of its use of classical Chinese instruments such as the *guqin*, *pipa*, *erhu*, *dizi*, or *zheng* (Xue 2015: 43; Tu and Zhou 2018: 52).

Scholarly debate revolves around the distinction between *gufeng* and its neighbouring concept, China Wind, both of which reflect an obsession with symbols of China. As Chow and de Kloet suggest, China Wind is a hybridised genre, as it juxtaposes "classical Chinese melodies and/or instruments with trendy global pop style, particularly R&B and hip-pop" (Chow and de Kloet 2010: 60). Aiping Wang argues that *gufeng* is more local and authentic than China Wind, which incorporates Chinese elements into Western-styled R&B music, as its melody sticks with the five-tone composition and its lyrics emphasise the meter of classical Chinese poetry (Wang 2014: 142). Xue Dongyan, Zhou Xianbao, and Xiong Chuyue find such a distinction blurred by the inevitable hybridisation of *gufeng*. Since most bands are based online, the music composition, recording, mixing, and other post-production procedures rely on software such as MIDI, FruityLoops Studio, and Adobe Audition (Xue 2015: 43; Zhou and Xiong 2016: 103). The ubiquitous use of electronic software makes *gufeng* deviate from its vintage intentions and thus more vulnerable to electronic and Western popular music: one can find the incorporation of rap, soft rock, R&B, and jazz into *gufeng* music (Xue 2015: 43). Sun Weibo further suggests that the critical difference between *gufeng* music and China Wind lies not so much in its use of Chinese elements but in its producers and targeted audiences: China Wind music is usually made by professional music companies for the mass market, while *gufeng* music is made by amateur musicians as cover songs or theme songs for video games or comics, circulating within its Internet fan communities (Sun 2017: 206). Remixed by amateur editors via computer software, the hybridisation of electronically generated natural sounds, soft-singing styles, and melancholic tonality performed by traditional Chinese instruments transports listeners to a nostalgic past distanced from their daily reality.

Most of the scholarly works on *gufeng* music mentioned above have been centred around the incorporation of Chinese elements and its relation to the China Wind musical genre. Is *gufeng* music only defined by its nationalistic component, or can we observe new themes emerging from amateur music creation? This article suggests that *gufeng* music does not simply demonstrate an obsession with ancient China and Chineseness – understood "as a feature shared by ethnic Chinese on the basis of discrete traits and traditions" (Chun 1996: 113) – but on the contrary shows how individuals appropriate the sounds and the imagery of ancient China in order to decentre China and integrate homoerotic themes. Because *gufeng* music is situated at the inter-generic and cross-media transformation of classical Chinese literature, contemporary *danmei* fiction, classical Chinese opera, China Winds music, video game music, and fan music MV, it can be best studied using a methodological approach of adaptation and transmedia studies. With this in mind, this article uses four case studies, complemented by other songs and music videos according to their connectivity to different

media and generic traditions: I have selected "Flower of Luoyang" as an example of fan adaptation of classical Chinese poetry, "Invisible Chang'an" as a case study of popular music adapted from classical Chinese literature, "The Constellations of Shen and Shang" as bringing together the traditions of video game music, classical Chinese opera, and *danmei* fiction, and "Fade Away" as combining China Winds music with *danmei* fiction. Through text and video analysis of these prominent *gufeng* songs and fan music videos, this article will show how "China" and "Chineseness" are understood and re-appropriated by the online *gufeng* community. The first part of this article deals with the contemporary use of Chinese cities in several *gufeng* songs. Through a semiotic analysis of the songs, we will see how these now-disappeared Chinese cities are (re)interpreted in a contemporary context. The second part will focus on the homoerotic imaginary developed in amateur *gufeng* MVs, which mobilise visual BL themes to accompany a supposedly "traditional" music.

Mourning the fallen city

Following the 1989 Tiananmen Square protest crackdown and the ultra-nationalist tract "China Can Say No," the rejection of Western-centric modernity has sparked various attempts to seek alternatives to Chinese modernity rooted in traditional Chinese cultural heritage (Leibold 2010: 546). Most *gufeng* music lyrics do not address a specific dynasty, but frequently set their story in great ancient cities such as Chang'an or Luoyang. Since Chang'an and Luoyang were both declared capitals 13 times until the Tang dynasty, the lyrics refer to the splendid past of Chinese antiquity in the heyday of the Han and Tang dynasties. Unable to anchor their "imagined community" (Anderson 2016) onto a specific chronotope as loyalists[4] did, the discourse of *gufeng* fans presents a "post-loyalist discourse," following David Wang's notion.[5] Although the "Chineseness" of pre-dynastic times actually encompasses different ethnic cultures, the post-loyalist discourse invents a singular "ethnic Chinese" at the time of antiquity, which functions as the "immutable and intangible origin" that overcodes heterogeneous minorities (Chun 1996: 113-6; Chow 1998: 17). In the case of *gufeng* music, fans can neither find their "origin" in the Maoist era nor the Qing dynasty, but use signifiers that vaguely refer to ancient China to bring the absent past into the present.

The post-loyalist sentiment of *gufeng* music can be found in "The Flower of Luoyang" (*Luoyang hua* 洛陽花) by Yoshi (2017), a song that best embodies the themes and sound of *gufeng* music. The background music imitates the sonic minimalism of ancient Chinese music that accompanies the chanting of poetry at an extremely slow pace, monophonic rhythm, and a five-note system with each note corresponding to one word in the lyric. "The Flower of Luoyang" is a seven-character poem, and its title denotes the peony, which is the symbol of the city of Luoyang and the national flower of China. In poems written by famous Tang poets such as Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 and Bai Juyi 白居易, the peony was set forth as the metonymic object of Luoyang, the capital of the Tang dynasty and a synecdoche for the prosperity of ancient China. After the Tang dynasty, Luoyang was no longer the capital, yet the peony is still referred to as the national flower of modern China. The title of the poem, contrary to this modern convention, insists upon naming the peony the "flower of Luoyang" rather than the national flower of China. Repositioning the peony as a symbol of Luoyang instead of a partial representation of China, the author highlights the aura of the flower in the vanished glory of the past, illustrated by the first four lines of the lyrics:

當時傾國看婉轉 *Dang shi qing guo kan wan zhuan*
如今傾城消悲歡 *Ru jin qing cheng xiao bei huan*
一脉疏痕遣夢痕 *Yi mai shu hen qian meng hen*
萬靨無情起無端 *Wan ye wu qing qi wu duan*
At times you look at her, the extreme beauty of whom causes the fall of a state
Now her splendour could still level a city, yet her joy and sorrow vanish without a trace
A stream of loose trace traces the trace of a dream,
Emerging without a cause are ten thousand affectionless smiles[6]

The past to be mourned is symbolised in the first sentence of the lyrics as the fallen state and the levelled city, the object that has already been lost. The phrases "the fall of a state" and "levelled city" are taken from Li Yannian's 李延年 poem, "There is a beauty in the North" (*Beifang you jia ren* 北方有佳人),[7] which describes the extreme beauty of a *femme fatale* who led to the fall of a state. The last two Chinese characters "婉轉" (*wanzhuan*, sweet and agreeable) are taken from Li Bai's 李白 poem "The long regret" (*Chang hen ge* 長恨歌),[8] which depicts the *femme fatale* as Yang Yuhuan (楊玉環, also known as Yang Guifei 楊貴妃), the queen of emperor Xuan of the Tang dynasty. The intertextual reference to Li's poem draws an analogy between the *femme fatale* and the fallen state, both of which have disappeared due to their extreme beauty. The second line attempts to bring the fall of a state from the absent past into the present by introducing its metonymic object, the "levelled city," which also disappeared following the fall of the state. The metonymical shift between those two lines substitutes an absent state with an absent city, and the attempt to bring the disappeared past into the present results in another signifier of disappearance. Such thematic obsession with loss can be best categorised as the post-loyalist sentiment that is "unable to carry a particular tradition forward, and what is lost still passed on" (Wang 2013: 83). As in the first two lines of the song, only loss, absence, and disappearance have been symbolically exchanged, without any positive attributes attached.

As Wang suggests, trapped in the posture of mourning for cultural roots that cannot be recovered, the post-loyalists paradoxically find their permanent home in imaginary nostalgia; that is, the "limitless exaggeration of loss, deficiency, and death as metaphysical topics" (Wang 2013: 85). In the lyrics of "Flower of Luoyang," the nostalgic sentiment of the imagined disappearance of a city and state is addressed by a line that captures such disappearance, the "affectionless smile that emerges out of nothing": The "affectionless smile" comes from nowhere; it is created *ex nihilo*. It is an empty gesture without an object to be referred to. The performance of the empty gesture quickly turns to the rehearsal of death in the following lines:

4. In political writings, the figure of the "loyalist" (遺民 *yimin*) refers to those who refuse to serve a new political regime (Tsai 2016: 832).
5. Wang defines the "post-loyalist" discourse as similar to loyalists' mourning of the loss of past polity and culture, but goes a step farther than loyalist discourse by "forcing the 'absence' into 'presence'" (Wang 2013: 82). If they cannot find solace in a previous dynasty or existing polity, they choose to fabricate a historical object to recover or restore (*ibid.*). As Wang explicates, the loyalists adhere to an orthodox political ideal, yet the post-loyalist discourse revolves around a "pre-loyalist" identity that resides in the "prehistory" before the birth of the current reign and "act[s] as if this reign were something lost in the past" (*ibid.*).
6. All translations of lyrics in the article are by the author.
7. A poem written during the Western Han dynasty (202 A.D.-8 A.D.)
8. A poem written during the Tang dynasty (618 A.D.-907 A.D.)

驚聽蕊動如雷綻 *Jing ting rui dong ru lei zhan*
惻聞瓣舒似江緩 *Ce wen ban shu si jiang huan*
折顱肯折貌絕世 *Zhe lu ken zhe mao jue shi*
名花寶刀相見歡 *Ming hua bao dao xiang jian huan*
Astoundingly I heard the whimper of the bud like a thunderstorm
Secretly I detect the blossom of the petals as the slow-moving stream
The head of a rare beauty could only be cut off
In a joyful *rendezvous* between a famed flower and a treasured knife

The narrator splits into a subject of enunciation who can decode the "whimper of the bud" and appreciate the "blossom of the petals," and a subject to be enunciated, the peony that is willing to be beheaded by a "treasured knife." The split subject in the stanza shows the expected encounter between ancient and modern China. Since one's self-consciousness demands recognition from the Other, the awareness of the beauty of pre-modern China needs a modernising gaze to be recognised. Without the arrival of the Other, the lyrics stage a rehearsal by incorporating the gaze of the expected Other as its alter ego and appropriate the othering gaze back upon itself in a narcissistic self-gaze. However, the rehearsal will not be actualised into a performance for spectators, and such a moment of recognition between the self and the awaited Other can never happen, since the "treasured knife" will cut off the flower if it recognises its "rare beauty," which suggests that ancient China can only be acknowledged by modernity at the cost of its own disappearance. The stanza can thus be read as a detour that ancient China has taken towards a belated modernity, the encountering of which, paradoxically, would have marked its own limit. As such, the hypothetical synchronicity of "joyful rendezvous" could never happen, and the recognition of this impossibility is further developed in the last four lines:

懸榻遙睇中宵夜 *Xuan ta yao ti zhong xiao ye*
露團搖曳朦朧燈 *Lu tuan yao ye meng long deng*
坐觀千年複千年 *Zuo guan qian nian fu qian nian*
可曾覓得簪花人 *Ke ceng mi de zan hua ren*
Hanging in the bedroom it gazes at the distant night
A ball of dewdrops swings in the dim light
Standing idly thousands of years after thousands of years
Has it ever met the one who wears flowers in her hair?

Such yearning for disappearance is expressed by the first two lines of the last stanza: the flower "gazes" into the distant night, waiting for the expected spectator to come, and metonymically transforms the dewdrops on the pedals to the "lamp with the dim light" that guides the spectator and prepares for its arrival. However, the hypothetical synchronised moment of recognition never happens, and the lyric ends with an out-of-synch temporal disjuncture. The peony "waited thousands of years after thousands of years" without having a chance of meeting the "treasured knife" that can cut off the petal and the one who can appreciate its beauty. The movement of the symbol of ancient China towards the disappearance is arrested and altered to a prolonged waiting for a mourning loss to be recovered and recognized. Facing a profound loss in the temporal rupture of the modernising condition, the narrator tries to recapture the prehistoric past of a fallen state. In this lyric, the "as if" dimension of such "prehistory" is made explicit as the empty symbol. The "affectionless smile" of the peony emerges out of nothing, and one can only find the nothingness if tracing back to this "prehistory." Therefore, only the traces of the traces can be traced back, and the prehistorical peony can never meet its modern spectator.

As "The Flower of Luoyang" describes ancient China waiting for the never-coming modern spectator, "Invisible Chang'an" (*Bujian Chang'an* 不見長安) by Hetu 河圖 depicts the repeated failure of a modern subject to find its prehistoric roots. The song is produced by the famous *gufeng* band Momingqimiao, and the lyrics tell of a sojourner who travels outside of his hometown to visit Chang'an, which he knows about from books and paintings (Hetu 2013). The song itself is very popular on streaming platforms; it has 2 million views on Xiami (Hetu 2010), while there are around a hundred amateur uploads of the song on the streaming platform Bilibili.[9] The tempo of the melody is moderately slow, with repeated motifs creating a mood of sadness, prolonging the detouring routes of the root-seeking path and intensifying the melancholic sentiment of the failure to meet the idealised vision of Chang'an. Similar to the structure of "The Flower of Luoyang," "Invisible Chang'an" marks the object to be mourned as irredeemably lost even before the narrative unfolds. The title is taken from an historical anecdote in *A New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu* 世説新語) that recorded the dialogues of the elites from the Late Han (25-220 A.D.) to the Wei Jin period (220-420 A.D.). The story takes place after the fall of the Western Jin dynasty and the conquest of the capital Chang'an by northern minorities (316 A.D.), when the elites of the Jin were forced to migrate eastward and establish the Eastern Jin dynasty. When Sima Rui, the first emperor of the Eastern Jin dynasty, asks his son, "How far away is Chang'an compared with the sun?", the son answers, "The sun is farther away; since I've never heard of anyone coming here from the sun, we can know it for certain" (Liu, Liu, and Mather 2002: 319). However, when Sima Rui asks his son again at a banquet in front of all his ministers, his son replies, "The sun is nearer," since "by just lifting your eyes you can see the sun, but you can't see Chang'an" (*ibid.*). The reference to this anecdote sets up Chang'an as a primordial object that has been lost in the traumatic encounter with the minority Other.

What motivates the narrator to depart from his hometown is "Chang'an written on paper," "Chang'an in the story," the Chang'an that he dreamed of, and the Chang'an painted on the scroll he envisioned. The desire to see Chang'an exemplifies the imaginary nostalgia felt by the post-loyalists, in that the narrator never meets the Chang'an he longs for, and the Chang'an he desires to return to is an empty symbol of the imaginary place he has never been to. Since the real city denoted remains unknown for the narrator, Chang'an can only be narrated via its metaphorical substitution – the crescent moon in the town and girls in Luoyang embroidering the peony – all of which remind the narrator of Chang'an. This echoes the anecdote that the title of the lyrics refers to, in which accessibility to Chang'an has been closed off prior to the unfolding of the narrative. Similarly, the name of Chang'an in the lyrics appears as a blank in the signifier chain, the presence of which can only be implied by substituting other signifiers to it.

The names of the fallen cities of ancient China, such as Chang'an and Luoyang, have become empty symbols that call for the collective mourning of diasporic subjects. Admittedly, a significant number of the singers, composers, and lyricists of *gufeng* music are overseas residents who studied abroad. As shown by the comments on the video adaptation of "Invisible Chang'an" uploaded to Bilibili, most of the commentators are not physically removed, and some of them are even current residents of Chang'an, today known as Xi'an. Though the name "Xi'an" dates back to the Ming dynasty, it is still considered a modern name disliked by *gufeng* fans in the comment section of the video online. Comments on the "Invisible Chang'an" video

9. See: https://search.bilibili.com/all?keyword=%22 不見長安%22 (accessed on 23 March 2020).

(see Figure 1) state, for instance: "You are just born in Xi'an, not Chang'an," "Chang'an no longer exists," and "Chang'an, what a good name. Why do people want to change it to Xi'an?" (Qiaoqiaoqiaomi 2014). The name Chang'an represents for the fans the loss of a bygone era. Since Chang'an was the capital from the Han dynasty to the Tang dynasty, they believe that the signifier "Chang'an" represents the glorious past of China, which is shown by one of the commentators stating that they are devoting their "whole life to restoring the glory of Han and Tang" (Qiaoqiaoqiaomi 2014). Disenchanted with modern China, the fans associate their hometown with the splendid past of China during the Han and Tang, and are trapped in the melancholy sentiment of being disconnected from that vanished place they fabricated. Consequently, *gufeng* fans share a diasporic sentiment towards ancient China signified by "Chang'an," even if they are physically situated in the very place whose disappearance they are mourning.

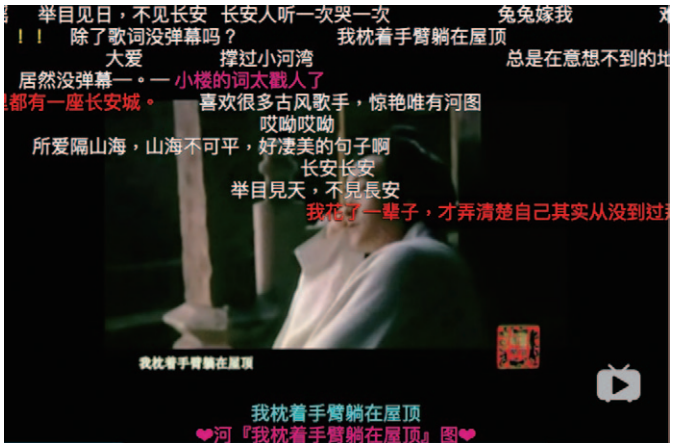

Figure 1. Comments on the Bilibili video of "Invisible Chang'an" using "bullet-subtitles."
Credit: Screenshot provided by the author, from https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1ws411Z71R (accessed on 23 March 2020).

The quasi-synchronicity of the media structure of the website Bilibili has facilitated the collective mourning of the fan community of *gufeng* music. Since the barrage subtitle system of Bilibili superimposes all of the comments being discussed regardless of the time of their upload, the pseudo-synchronic setting of Bilibili has evoked a sense of collective watching (Zheng 2016: 334; Li 2017: 248). Mediated by the video adaptation of *gufeng* music, viewers located across different time-spaces find a virtual chronotope for ritual performance of communal mourning. For instance, most of the comments are simple repetitions of the lyrics, such as "You can see the sun, but you can't see Chang'an." However, the meaningless repetition of the lyrics serves as "counter-transparent writings" that divert the viewer from understanding the streaming content (Johnson 2013: 306; Zheng 2016: 337). What the commentator is concerned with is not the repeated content, but the act of repetition itself. Similarly, *gufeng* fans are not as concerned about the object to be mourned as they are about the ritual of mourning.

As the lyrics state, everyone has his or her own version of Chang'an, and what fans share in common is not the positive description of Chang'an but rather its negativity, the loss of the Chang'an they desired. In the video, what corresponds to the lyrics "I need a scroll in my mind painted in the shape of Chang'an" is not a city with clear boundaries, but a blurred image of ancient architecture. One can never know what has been painted on the "scroll" and what is signified by "Chang'an." What bind the viewers together are the emptiness of the signifier and the blurriness of the scroll that prevent one from clearly recognising Chang'an. Without a concrete image to be shown, the empty symbol "Chang'an" can only be defined negatively with respect to its modern name, Xi'an, which can be found in a floating comment that interprets the modern name of the city as "Xi'an" as "turning westward towards Chang'an." The mourning in *gufeng* music is thus an orientation of (re)turning towards the vanished place in the past, without a clearly defined destination to be reached. In the case of *gufeng* lyrics, every lyricist and commentator envisions the ancient cities of Chang'an and Luoyang differently, which makes it impossible to derive a common denominator out of their imaginations. It is the profound loss of the ancient cities that bind them together in the ritual of collective mourning, which crystalizes into the lyrics as empty symbols without any positive descriptions. Paradoxically, it is the impossibility of materialising the splendid past represented by the terms Chang'an and Luoyang that opens up the imaginary potential for (re)interpretations. Consequently, it is the emptiness of the metaphors in *gufeng* lyrics that makes it readily recontextualised in further alterations, adaptations, and appropriations.

Homoeroticising history

The imaginary potential in the lyrics of *gufeng* music is actualised in the form of visual adaptations: the fan MV. As analysed in the previous section, *gufeng* music lyrics are structured around names of ancient Chinese cities that are deprived of actual signification, metaphorically represented by flowers and anonymous female characters. In further adapting *gufeng* music to music videos, however, these names must be concretised into visual forms as the lyrics are coupled with footage. Most *gufeng* music videos are produced by fans of *Lishi tongren* who combine the lyrics with fragmentary shots of historical figures in films and television dramas to fabricate BL narratives unrelated to the original context. This brings a shift in thematic concern from place-based imaginations to character-based male-male narratives, blatantly betraying the intent of the source texts' implicit or explicit heterosexual love. Investigating the word-image references in the *gufeng* MVs "The Constellations of Shen and Shang" and "Fade Away," I will demonstrate how the lyrics and video footage are decontextualized from the source texts while being recontextualized with homoerotic narratives in the video adaptations.

The production process of the well-known fan-made MV, "The Constellations of Shen and Shang" (*Shenshang* 參商), shows how the cover song of *gufeng* and the fan-made MV de-territorializes and reterritorializes masculine history (Lanno 2018). Footage in the MV is taken from the TV drama *Emperor Wu of Han* (2005), a biographical story about the life of the emperor Liu Che (156 B.C.-87 B.C.), and the background music is "The Constellations of Shen and Shang," a cover song that narrates the homoerotic romance between two male figures in the martial arts video game *Jx3*. The melody of the cover song derives from the theme song "Promise" from another TV series, *The Phoenix*, which features the palace fighting drama during the Tang Dynasty under the reign of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang. What makes this audio-adaptation particularly problematic is that *Jx3* and *The Phoenix* pertain to heterosexual romance, yet the cover song appropriates the melody and rewrites the lyrics to narrate a homoerotic romance between the two figures in the video game, Li Aoxue and Ye Wenshui. However, as the lyrics are integrated into an MV with footage from *Emperor Wu of Han*, the narrative of the video game as the "source text" of second-hand adaptation is ignored. The remade video has nothing to do with the video game *Jx3*, nor does it follow the "third-hand" source text. In neither the primary historical text, *The Historical Records*, nor in the TV series it is adapted from, *Emperor*

Wu of Han, are the emperor Liu Che and the general Wei Qing described or depicted as a homosexual couple. Rather, it is the textual poaching process of the fan adaptation that arbitrarily interprets the emotional attachment between those two male figures as homosexual love, a notion blatantly opposed to the intention of the original text. The video adaptation for "The Constellations of Shen and Shang" therefore demonstrates the prototypical steps taken to remake the *gufeng* video to escape from the territory of masculine history, thereby reflecting a de-territorialization process of de-contextualizing the heterosexual narrative in the source text, and a re-territorializing the source text by implying a homoerotic narrative as pretext and subtext.[10]

The melody of the song is performed by a traditional Chinese instrument, the bamboo flute, as well as piano and electronic-simulated sounds of bird tweets and water drops that are mixed with MIDI software, to intensify the "other-world-ness" of a phantasmagorical past that is distant from daily reality. What makes the song ready to be decontextualized and appropriated is the separation between the "spoken part" (*nianbai* 念白), which provides a pretext and a context for narration of the lyrics by voiceover, and the song's melodic lyrics, a structure that is derived from classical Chinese opera. The spoken part contains a dialogue between the protagonists to clarify that the terms "Shen" and "Shang" in the lyric refer to two characters in the video game, Li Aoxue and Ye Wenshui. In the video adaptation of "The Constellations of Shen and Shang," however, the spoken part of the lyrics is removed and substituted by the wedding scene depicting the heterosexual male emperor, Liu Che (156 B.C.-87 B.C.), and his first queen, Chen Ajiao (?-110 B.C.) in *Emperor Wu of Han*. The shot featuring Chen Ajiao is intentionally left out of the video in the reediting process, with only the maid passing by behind the drumstick shown in the foreground, foreshadowing the drumbeat in the next shot (Figure 2). Instead, the next image features the drumstick knocking on the drumhead in a low angle shot and the drumhead rotating in a counter-clockwise direction until it is perpendicular to the ground (Figure 3). After the image of drumhead is faded to an upright position and reappears in the subsequent shot, the camera rotates clockwise to turn the vertical drumhead to its normal position parallel to the ground. The lyrical part of the music starts after the rotation of the drum, and the first line of the lyrics, "Who knows the darkling skies and yellow earth?" "One couldn't prophesy the asynchrony between the Shen and Shang" is accompanied by the shot-reverse-shot in black-and-white between Liu Che projecting a gaze downward (Figure 4) and Wei Qing (?-106 B.C.), the heterosexual male general, looking up (Figure 5). The rotation of the drumhead substitutes the heteronormative relation in the original wedding scene with the homoerotic subtext in the shot-reverse-shot of the video: as the drumhead is turned vertically, the sexual orientation between heterosexual couples is disoriented, and the "bride" and "husband" in the wedding scene are turned to an emptied subject position that is gender neutral. Correspondingly, the clockwise turn of the drumhead reorients the romance to a homosexual relationship, and designates the couple, namely, "Shen" and "Shang" and the "bride" and "husband," as Liu Che and Wei Qing. As such, the separation of the spoken part has transformed the lyrics into free-floating symbols, ready to be appropriated and resignified by the visual substitutes, turning the marriage between a queen and a king into a symbol of homosexual romance.

Figure 2. Music Video, "The Constellations of Shen and Shang," 2005. Credit: Screenshot provided by the author, from https://www.bilibili.com/video/av30268183 (accessed on 13 February 2019).

Figure 3. Music Video, "The Constellations of Shen and Shang," 2005. Credit: Screenshot provided by the author.

Figure 4. Music Video, "The Constellations of Shen and Shang," 2005. Credit: Screenshot provided by the author.

Figure 5. Music Video, "The Constellations of Shen and Shang," 2005. Credit: Screenshot provided by the author.

10. As Gilles Deleuze contends, the rhizome is not completely exterior to the arborescent system but merges with the roots and comes out of the roots in a double movement of "deterritorialization" and "re-territorialization" (Deleuze 1988: 13). The "deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization" as a mode of adaptation can be understood as an aesthetic strategy of de-contextualization and re-contextualization of the notion of "Chineseness" across audio-verbal-visual forms.

As "The Constellations of Shen and Shang" shows how the nouns in the lyrical text are converted into an empty subject position, primed for the imbrication of homoerotic content, the verbalising of the lyrical text in the video adaptation can also be deployed to obscure the agents of the action. This construct can be best illustrated by the song video "Fade Away" that narrates the romantic love story between Liu Bei (161 A.D.-223 A.D.) and Zhuge Liang (181 A.D.-234 A.D.). The original *gufeng* music is authored by Vincent Fang, who narrates a fictional love story between a general and a young girl in the northern Wei dynasty. The melodic part of the song is composed in a seven-note system in Yu mode, with the imbrication of R&B and rap, sung by Jay Chou in a husky voice. In the lyrics, the young girl and the general are separated by the war; the general is deployed to guard the city of Luoyang while the girl remains behind in the village, waiting for the general's return. However, after the general is defeated and returns to the village, the girl has already died. The general themes of waiting, longing, love and war are crystalized into one line in the lyrics: "I heard that you are still guarding the isolated city." The line can be interpreted metaphorically as "the girl desolately waits for the general in the alienated village." Yet it also carries a literal reference to the general who is guarding the city that has been surrounded by the enemy. The ambiguity of the pronoun has made "I" and "you" shifting subjects that can be occupied by any character of any gender or sexual orientation. As a result, the video remake of "Fade Away" exploits the ambiguity of the lyrics by retaining the act of "guarding" in the original lyrics and defining the subject of the act as Zhuge Liang. The footage selected to match the sentence is the scene in the TV series *Three Kingdoms* featuring "Empty City Strategy" (*Kongcheng ji* 空城計), a long shot featuring Zhuge Liang playing his *guqin* on the viewing platform and opening the city gate, manipulating reverse psychology to make the enemy believe that the empty city is prepared for ambush (Figure 6). The object to be "guarded" in this scene can be understood *denotatively* as the fort to be guarded, or *connotatively* as the secret love between himself and Liu Bei to be guarded, which rhizomatically transforms the connotation of a heterosexual love in the original lyric into a homoerotic romance.

The rhizomatic narrative of the fan-made video is made possible by its emphasis on the verb rather than the noun. Specifically, the homoeroticisation of the video is completed by removing the nominal subject in the original lyrics and video footage and retaining the verb phrase in its rhizomatic transformation. For instance, the phrase "passing the doorstep" in the lyrics connotes a traditional Chinese marriage ritual: after the bride steps across the doorstep of the bridegroom's household upon marriage, she is officially considered to be his wife. In the video adaptation, it is only the verb in the lyrics, "passing," that remains the same, with the subject of "passing" and the object to be passed undergoing metaphorical transformation. The footage chosen to match the phrase is the high angle shot capturing Zhuge Liang and Liu Bei passing into the city fort of Chengdu after conquering it, which functions as an establishing shot in the source text (Figure 7). With the bridegroom and the bride substituted by Zhuge Liang and Liu Bei, and the doorstep supplanted by the city fort, the connotation in the original lyrics, the heterosexual romance, and the grandiose history of conquering the cities and states in the *Three Kingdoms*, are subverted into the homoerotic narrative. Inspired by this video adaptation, "Fade Away" has become the most popular *gufeng* music for fan-made videos. With the original works ranging from television dramas to video games to fan fiction, there are more than 400 video adaptations that use "Fade Away" as their background music. In this cross-reference between the lyrical text and video adaptation, the heterosexual context is substituted by a homoerotic subtext, and the return to the root of ancient China and its history is distorted via a rhizomatic route.

Figure 6. Music Video, "Fade Away," 2010. Credit: Screenshot provided by the author, from https://www.bilibili.com/video/av13600500 (accessed on 13 February 2019).

Figure 7. Music Video, "Fade Away," 2010. Credit: Screenshot provided by the author.

Therefore, *gufeng* MVs decontextualize their source texts by selecting empty symbols in the lyrics of the original song, coupling them with fragmentary footage extracted from the narrative flow of a television drama to recontextualize a homoerotic narrative in the word-image references. In "The Constellations of Shen and Shang," the video editors selected the empty symbols in the nominal form, Shen and Shang, metaphorically transforming them into the empty subject position that any figure might fill. The decontextualized words and footage are recontextualized to a homoerotic narrative via shot-reverse-shot and eye-line match. As in the video "Fade Away," the editor retains the subject-less verbs "passing" and "guarding" in the adaptation while matching the verb with footage of male figures performing the same action instead of the female subject that the original lyrics imply. Accordingly, the empty symbols in the lyrics are transformed into the empty subject positions in the video editing, available to be adapted to the male-male homoerotic narratives.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates the paradoxical narrative underlying the Sinophone articulation of "Archaic Wind music." In order to return to the roots of "Chineseness" that *gufeng* fans imagine, China's absent past must be brought to the present through empty symbols in the lyrics. Paradoxically, it is in the process of forcing the past into the present that the orientation towards the past is disoriented in the rhizomatic ramifications of the video adaptations. As such, *gufeng* music shows an alternative mode of Sinophone articulation: The verbal lyrics begin with the root-seeking tendency of returning to cultural China, yet the visual adaptations de-contextualize and re-contextualize such roots via homoerotic motifs in their cross-media adaptation. This rhizomatic adaptation is preconditioned by the verbal lyrics that open up the polysemic potential of the absence of actual signification with a temporal distance between the past and present and is actualised in the fan music videos of *gufeng* music, which subvert the masculine proper and heterosexual romance via homoerotic subtext. *Gufeng* music's significance therefore does not lie in the explicit confrontation in a political act that would result in an immediate impact on Chinese society, but in a metaphorical alteration of the notion of "Chineseness" at a micro-level through temporal and gender tropes.

▌Yiwen Wang is a Ph.D student in the Literature department of University of California, San Diego, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA, 92092, USA (yiw131@ucsd.edu).

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