

“Bang Bang Bang” – Nonsense or an Alternative Language?

The Lingualscape in the Chinese Remake of *I Am a Singer**

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ABSTRACT: Through examining the Chinese remake of the Korean television program *I Am a Singer*, I explore the questions of how a Chinese musical television reality show performs and represents the newly rising aesthetic demands for de-territorialising what I term the “lingualscape,” the shifting landscape of languages intermingled with and liberated from standardised national languages; and how it interplays with affective negotiation in the practices of translation or transplantation within the context of cultural de-territorialisation. This Sino-Korean musical TV program demonstrates nonethnic-centred imaginings across national and state-sanctioned ideological boundaries. The lingualscape performs affective negotiation and rises above the official lingual system, a process through which sincere communication becomes possible in a digital time.

KEYWORDS: China, Korea, K-pop, lingualscape, remake, musical television program, politics of language, affective negotiation.

Introduction

“Our criticism of these linguistic models is not that they are too abstract but, on the contrary, that they are not abstract enough, that they do not reach the abstract machine that connects a language to the semantic and pragmatic contents of statements, to collective assemblages of enunciation, to a whole micropolitics of the social field. A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.” (Deleuze *et al.* 1987: 8)

“Even if music is said to be a universal language, the resistance to a foreign-language lyric could be overcome easier with beauty standards and dance routines of the prevailing global norm. MTV of course had appeared as early as 1981, but it nonetheless remained tethered to the music industry and its networks and practices (...) Given the strong inflection of English lyric, it is difficult to decipher from listening just briefly whether the song is in Korean or any other language.” (Lie 2012: 356)

Conceptual framework

In the contemporary *world of screens*, content freely penetrates barriers, negotiating the elimination of the boundaries of nations, ideologies, and even language, the most stubborn and, possibly, the last boundary that remains within human society. Employing screen-based communications

characterised by a more affective and sensory co-experience, the linguistic exchanges in this new era of the screen demonstrate an inclination toward transcending a variety of barriers, including language barriers. More than 35 years ago, Benedict Anderson noted that the “fatality of human linguistic diversity” in print-capitalism has contributed to the “artefacts” of “nation” (Anderson 1983). This “fatality” can be understood as resulting from the inherent gaps that occur when different linguistic registers collide. The pop culture fad known as the Korean Wave (*hallyu*) was firstly recognised and widely disseminated in the Sinophone world over the last two decades. Chinese television and entertainment sectors roll out a myriad of remakes of Korean television programs, which have become a new pattern of *hallyu* – transformed from an imported culture to a collaborative, incorporative, and interlaced set of projects – in mainland China within the context of bilateral tensions. Nothing is better positioned to exemplify the quotidian exchanges than the influence of Korean musical television programs, through which Chinese audiences’ lives cross linguistic and ideological boundaries via a screen media form. Scholars have discussed the cultural hybridisation thesis in the context of the globalisation of K-pop and of Korean popular culture in general (Shim 2006; Ryoo 2009; Jin and Ryoo 2014; Lee 2017; Yoon 2018). Scholarship has also foregrounded how K-pop is institutionalised to serve national branding in the interest of building Korea’s soft power (Lie 2014; Choi 2015). Others have centred their inquiries on the “idols” of

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K-pop, including the problematics of commercialisation and gender, either lambasting the "syndrome of girl idols," referring to the spectacularisation and commercialisation of girl idols' bodies, or on the versatile manufacture of boy idols' masculinity to be Asianized or globally marketable (Shin 2009; Lee 2009; Kim 2010; Kim 2011; Jung 2011).

On the Chinese side, scholarship on the politics of media culture has noted government authorities' strategic management of popular music conducive to "national ideologies," nationalist agendas, or "Chineseness" (Ho 2006; Fung 2007; Chow 2010). Ho and Law (2012) discussed how the state uses traditional Chinese culture to legitimise its authority. Much has also been written about political parodies and entertainment-masked democracy or "democratic entertainment" commodities in China (Jian and Liu 2009). Among other studies, Wu and Wang showed that the *haixuan* (海選, village election) and *PK* (Player Killing) in the Chinese musical competition show *Super Girls* recaptured a sense of democracy "in response to young people's desire, commodified daily experience and the invisible trajectory of crying that we could own as basic individual rights." (2008: 417). Although the term *hallyu* was coined in the Sinophone context, cultural entanglements between Korean and Chinese popular music have received little attention in English-language academic publications. This article examines the politics of language and affect in Korean pop music's spread within the Sinophone musical world. More specifically, it centres on the question of how K-Pop phenomena have crossed borders and have been (re)produced, and how these shows reflect and simultaneously are shaped by audiences' new aesthetic sensibilities in the context of their interplay with affective negotiation, in response to increasing demands originating from screen culture's travel across borders.

Research methods

This research has been done through a critical examination of the Chinese remake of the Korean television reality program *I Am a Singer*. It does so by analysing the content and visual-audio aspects of the program, conducting fieldwork in South Korea on the Chinese-Korean audiences' interactions on and off screen, studying online and in-studio audiences' reactions to the program, and engaging critical theories to explore a new analytical concept in understanding cultural and affective entanglements in a time in which screen culture thrives. In this paper, I will explore questions of how the show performs and represents the newly rising aesthetic demands of what I term the "lingualscape," and in particular, how it interplays with affective negotiation in the practices of translation or transplantation within the context of cultural de-territorialisation. Arjun Appadurai's framework of fluid ethnoscape, technoscape, financescape, mediascape, and ideoscape sheds light on the understanding of the global cultural flows (Appadurai 1996). In these processes of de-territorialisation, however, the concept of a shifting lingualscape is absent. I conceptualise the lingualscape as the shifting landscape of languages intermingled with and liberated from standardised national languages through which people communicate at both affective and enunciative levels. I argue that the shifting lingualscape in this Sino-Korean musical TV program demonstrates nonethnic-centred imaginings across national and state-sanctioned ideological boundaries. The lingualscape performs affective negotiation within nation-state official narratives and rises above the official lingual system, a process through which sincere communication becomes possible in a digital time. Critical examination of the interplay between the shifting lingualscape and affective negotiation outside of state-sanctioned official languages foregrounds not only new perspectives on the relationship

between China and Korea, but more broadly, an understanding of connecting audiences free from the cohesive violence of language.

Lingualscape and re-compositions

I Am a Singer is a Chinese musical TV show remade from a Korean program of the same name. It debuted on 18 January 2013, close to the Lunar New Year, and viewers have watched it every Friday night since then. This broadcast time has made the show one of the New Year activities among Chinese audiences across different generations. The program has been one of the most popular reality TV shows in mainland China for the past five years. The provincial satellite station Hunan TV imported *I Am a Singer* from the Korean MBC (*Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation*), and its first season was produced as a Sino-Korean collaboration. In addition to being broadcast by Hunan TV, the show is also available in Taiwan from GTV and GTV Variety Show; in Hong Kong from Now Mango, TVB (*Television Broadcasts Limited*) Jade, and J5 (*TVB Finance Channel*); and in Malaysia from Astro Quanjia HD. *I Am a Singer* departs from previous shows such as *Super Girls* in that instead of entire Chinese audiences sitting in front of the TV voting on the competition, only a select 500-member audience – consisting of individuals of different ages, genders, and occupations – who are present at the show have the right to vote to eliminate one of the seven singers after each week's competition. The competition rules are from its Korean original version. The new competition mechanism has given the show the tone of an apolitical, transnational, and translingual game. In such a game, audiences' emotional participation, which had previously been interpreted as the realisation of individual rights, has shifted into a collective manifestation seeking transnational cultural, lingual, financial, and emotional exchanges.

John Lie once noted about K-pop, "[G]iven the strong inflection of English lyric, it is difficult to decipher from listening just briefly whether the song is in Korean or any other language" (2012: 356). This blurriness in Korean popular music is a strategic move: it is constructed by the social and aesthetic desire for a fluid lingualscape. The interplay between a shifting lingualscape and affective interactions implies an aspiration for communication outside of the state-sanctioned official languages. This negotiation is embedded within the context of Sino-Korean interactions of musical television programs. These cross-border interactions are structured by the logic of negotiating, penetrating, and eliminating boundaries by the affective medium of the screen, accompanied by the capitalist logic of self-expansion. Screen culture proliferates, expands, and imagines a de-territorialised/re-territorialised zone in the general public's daily life. In these processes of de-territorialisation, the desire for eliminating language barriers is well reflected in the exchanges of musical television programs, a media form driven by a combination of screen culture's proliferation, capitalist market expansion, television's emphasis on the general public's everydayness, and musical interactions bound to affective exchanges and reflective of liberation from official languages.

The remake of *I Am a Singer* invited the winner from its Korean original version to perform in the third season (2015), a technique that is commonly used in other Chinese remakes of Korean TV shows. The Korean singer known as "The One" (정순원) sang the theme songs of many popular K-dramas, such as *All About Eve*, *Only You*, *Princess Hours*, *That Winter the Wind Blows*, and *Famous Child Princesses*, and garnered warm praise from Chinese and other Asian audiences. It is worth mentioning at this point that the popularity of K-drama outside of South Korea has laid the groundwork for cultivating overseas fandom and developing affective empathy among audiences. Some of the in-studio audience members are drawn from this international fan base.

Hunan TV, famous for being an entertainment hub among other TV channels in mainland China, had also imported *Only You* and *Famous Child Princesses* to China. Hunan TV had already aired these shows, so when The One appeared on *I Am a Singer*, the songs were already popular among viewers. In the third season of *I Am a Singer*, The One's trilingual (Chinese, Korean, and English) performance of *My Destiny*, the theme song of the hit K-drama *My Love from the Star*, drew a standing ovation and enthusiastic cheers from the audience. His bilingual (Chinese and Korean) performance of the song *That Man*, the theme song of another hit K-drama, *Secret Garden*, earned him the position of champion for that week. The performance of the same song in the original Korean show has also drawn Korean audiences' warm applause for its emotional resonance. His emotional stage and rendition of *Secret Garden*'s moving soundtrack in the Chinese *I Am a Singer* were covered by *Koreaboo*, a digital media across multiple platforms that shares viral Korean pop culture in English to audience from all around world, drawing Korean audience's attention to this performance in connecting with his Chinese fandom and beyond: “[K]nown by many fans as Girls' Generation's Taeyeon's vocal coach, The One impressed Chinese audiences with his powerful performance of 'That Man.' He sang the first half of the song in Chinese, revealing his language flexibility, before transitioning to the original Korean lyrics.”¹ His performance of the Chinese remake went viral on various online platforms among Chinese and Korean audience, including on YouTube, to which access is not officially granted in China, while an affective and interactive fandom community has been forged. Audiences from around the globe, in difference languages, left comments free of ethnic and linguistic boundaries such as, “[I] feel this is very touching although there are words that I don't understand,” “Why is there a need to differentiate nationality, isn't it good enough to just enjoy the song?,” “I'm so excited just because of his voice,” “My tears run down when singing along with him,” and “Language doesn't matter, just believe in your ears.”² What our ears and eyes capture are not merely about language or ethnicity. In these interactive online appraisals, sensorial co-experience is highly stressed while standardised national languages are played down. Prior to performing in the Chinese remake, The One had twice been the champion in the Korean version of *I Am a Singer* and co-performed as a guest with the Chinese singer Huang Qishan in the final show of the first season of the Chinese remake in 2013 (Figure 1). The connections between the original show and the remake were underscored by this co-performance, which featured the song “Without You.” The lyrics of the song, “I can't live, the living without you,” not only imply the intertextual survival of the cultural flows but also reveal unavoidable de-territorialisation. The increasing mobility and fluidity of transnational cultural (co)production and (co)consumption have been (re) shaping the “territory” of each nation from a myriad of dimensions.



Figure 1. Korean singer The One and Chinese singer Huang Qishan's co-performance of “Without you” in *I Am a Singer*. Photo from Chinese remake *I Am a Singer*, season 1, episode 13, 12 April 2013. Screenshot provided by the author.

In such a context, Appadurai's theory on the de-territorialisation of the world landscape offers a closely bounded transnationalism rather than a space defined by national borders. Appadurai constructs a framework for global cultural flows, which he loosely defines with the categories ethnoscape, technoscape, financescape, mediascape, and ideoscape. As Appadurai explains, the usage of the suffix “-scape” indicates “the fluid and irregular shapes of these landscapes” (1996: 28). This framework provides a heuristic device for reading the Sino-Korean relationship at the intersection of media, ideology, ethnicity, economy, and technology. Ethnoscape, defined as “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live” (*ibid.*: 33), refers to the intensified movement of people across borders. In the case of Sino-Korean interactions, for instance, it is well known that Chinese tourists make up the largest portion of overseas visitors in South Korea; less discussed and perhaps unexpected, however, is the fact that South Koreans are also the largest subsection of overseas visitors to the PRC.³ Tourism and the increasing Sino-Korean co-productions in visual media strongly suggest that onscreen worlds, which spark the spectators' imagination, can lead to offscreen interactions in their everyday lives. In turn, these imaginings have been shaped and intensified by the participants' engaged practices on and off screen. In such a process, it is not difficult at all to imagine the interplay between ethnoscape and other “scapes,” including linguascape. We would be reductive to make ethnoscape equal to linguascape, as the visual-aural communication and affective interactions traversing screen and actuality are not taken into consideration, not to mention that ethnic identity does not always suggest one's national identity or usage of a certain language (i.e., there are 56 ethnic groups in China, including the Korean ethnic group, in the case of Sino-Korean interactions). And the emphasis on the semantic statement and micropolitics of linguascape signals a significant departure from the mediascape. Each deterritorialising “scape” cannot be fully understood without first placing itself in an intersectional framework where each “scape” interacts with other “-scapes.”

Combining the growing influence of the shifting mediascape and technoscape, Korean TV shows have created a new disjuncture between what Appadurai calls “spatial and virtual neighbourhoods” (*ibid.*: 189). These “neighbours” are given access to each other through the projection of their similar imaginations about daily trivialities onto the screen. As individuals and yet collectively, virtual neighbours actively engage in the activity that contributes to the ever changing financescape, technoscape, and mediascape. Such activity, and the changes it shapes, takes place within the dynamics of juxtaposing affinity and resistance between Korea and China. In return, the Chinese mediascape has been reshaped along with the shifting ethnoscape by placing Korean singers on the stage of the Chinese remake.

1. “The One takes first with ‘That Man’ on China’s ‘I Am A Singer 3,’” *Koreaboo*, 17 February 2015: <https://www.koreaboo.com/video/one-takes-first-man-chinas-singer-3/> (accessed on 18 July 2018).
2. See, for instance, the great number of views and active communication among audiences, in different languages, across from China, Korea, and beyond, on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFLyXDKi7E> (accessed on 18 July 2019). Also see Korean audiences' online appraisals of Chinese remake *I Am a Singer*, which are translated into Chinese: *Hujiang Korean*, 29 January 2013, <https://kr.hujiang.com/new/p447502/> (accessed on 20 July 2019).
3. Data on Korean international tourists collected from Korean Tourism Organization, <https://kto.visitkorea.or.kr/eng/tourismStatics/keyFacts/KoreaMonthlyStatistics.kto> (accessed on 25 June 2017). Thanks to Lynn at Hallyu Experience Office, a marketing agency of Seoul Metropolitan Government, who generously provided me with suggestions and access to obtain data regarding tourism during my field research in Seoul in June 2017. Data on international tourists in China is from China Tourism Academy's *Annual Report of China Inbound Tourism Development 2017*. Also see the report in *People's Daily Overseas Edition*, 18 October 2017, <http://finance.sina.com.cn/chanjing/cywx/2017-10-18/doc-ifymviwp2125936.shtml> (accessed on 20 November 2017).

Collaborating with Korean partners and learning from the Korean production technologies and methodologies of musical programs has reformed the mediascape and technoscape on the Chinese scene.

These re-compositions in diverse sectors interconnect with the flowing financescape. In recognition of the success of casting Korean singer The One in the third season, the Chinese remake of *I Am a Singer* cast another Korean singer, Hwang Ch'iyöl (황치열), in its fourth season in 2016.⁴ After singing popular theme songs such as "You Are My Everything" from the hit K-drama *Descendants of the Sun*, the Chinese song "Bitter Sea," and "An Oath of One's Own," among others, Hwang's fandom rapidly grew, numbering five million Chinese fans on the most popular Chinese social media platform, Weibo. His name promptly went viral after the previous nine years of relative silence in pop music, both in Korea and China. This rising popularity enabled him to achieve huge success in new album sales; the booking fees for his musical performances skyrocketed. According to the Korean Gaon Record Chart's investigation, the sales of his newly-issued mini album *Be Ordinary* reached more than 220,000 copies, making him the highest-selling soloist in 2017, surpassing the record of all solo artists in the last four years.⁵ His booking fee soared to 1,670,000 RMB, which is 100 times the price in South Korea.⁶ His success and influence capitalised on his exposure to audiences via the screen and has consequently (re)shaped the Sino-Korean financescape, standing as one of the most representative examples of scape-morphing embodiment and a border-crossing beneficiary in this new pattern of *hallyu* remakes.

The interactions between all these fluid -scapes reshape not only post-national identities but also the relationship between China and Korea. The interconnections create bonds between Korea and China that afford an alternative to Western-centric hegemonic transculturation. The shifts of the linguascape in the Sino-Korean context are also seen in hybridised forms of national culture. Hybridity has been suggested as an explanation for the success of *hallyu*. Doobo Shim points out that hybridity has become a field of struggle when Korean culture started to be confronted with global cultural domination in the era of globalisation (2006). This hybridity is a negotiation between a minority culture, which seeks cultural expansion, and mainstream global cultural hegemony. Gerardo Mosquera also argues that experiences of hybridity, appropriation, and re-semanticisation gain power in the increasing interactions among cultures (2012). Grounded within hybridised forms, the merging of and connections between Korean and Chinese television programs have strengthened both sides' competitiveness in the television industries within and beyond their domestic audiences, forming a transnational spectatorship that is not dominated by the West.

Constant de-territorialisation has already made "Chineseness" or "Koreanness" hybridised notions, rendering baseless the claim to either ethnic-centred culture. We live in "a great time of hybrids," as the Mexican rock star Rockdrigo sang (quoted in Mosquera 2012). Hybridity indeed empowers the spread of both the Korean original show and its Chinese remake. This "time of hybrids," however, also suggests that the theory of hybridity is not unique to Korean culture, of course, and so a particularistic reading lacks intellectual layers to understand the cultural phenomenon. Still, hybridity is a fundamental context and should be the starting point for our studies of Korea, of China, and of transnationality. More important questions emerge within this context: what sorts of hybridity are there to make a difference in our daily lives? In what modes and how would the intermingling account for the ways we view and communicate with each other within the context of parallel tensions of official narratives?

Affective negotiation

The linguascape performs an affective negotiation outside of state-sanctioned lingual systems, which facilitates a non-politicised communication among the general public. This adds a layer to the hybridisation discussed previously. The boundary-blurring multilingual lyrics featured on *I Am a Singer* are far less about "accurate" communication in a standard language than they are about affective communication. The lyrics acknowledge linguistic pluralism and de-territorialise the linguascape. Co-consumption and co-production practices in the Sino-Korean musical television program both shape and are shaped by the intermingling; it is not so much a hybridity strategy but a fuzzy blurriness, refusing to be sublimated or translated and deconstructing any ethno- or national- centric interpretation. In the Chinese remake of the Korean show *I Am a Singer*, it would be hard to define a performance associated with either Chineseness or Koreanness. Hwang Ch'iyöl's trilingual (Chinese, Korean, and English) performance of "Bang Bang Bang" in season four, for instance, took that week's crown and received warm applause from the audience and music critics. *Allkpop*, a US-based Korean pop blog, reported this performance in which Hwang "stood on stage, decked out in a white tuxedo, and blew away the audience."⁷ *BNTNews* commented that Hwang's "deep and emotional voice" and "passionate dance" has made him "received enthusiastic reactions from the crowd"; "it is no exaggeration to say that Hwang brought 'Hwang Chi Yeol fever' in China," and "Hwang is rising to stardom in China as one of the Hallyu celebrity."⁸ Indeed, it was a sensation on Weibo and covered by *China Daily*, in which Hwang's remake was compared to the original version sung by BIGBANG, which was, of course, itself recomposed from Teddy G-Dragon's piece by Shin Seung-ick.⁹ Besides the elements borrowed from Black musical conventions in the original song, Hwang's performance also incorporated a prelude of music and movements from the James Bond film franchise's iconic opening, Broadway style orchestration, Korean rap, and Chinese and English lyrics, not to mention the Korean and Chinese dancers, Hong Kong music director, and the live band made up of musicians from the United States, Hong Kong, Portugal, mainland China, Korea, and Australia, without whom Hwang's performance would perhaps not have been received as it was. Although there could be a whole article's worth of analysis only on the origins of the instruments, garments, makeup, props, and the mutual influence between them, each dimension's intermingling increases the difficulty of defining the nationality or origin of this performance.

4. Korean words and names are romanised using the McCune-Reischauer system in this article (i.e. Hwang Ch'iyöl) unless they are quoted from other sources. Hwang Chi Yeol or Hwang Chi-yeol is the romanisation of the same name according to the Revised Romanisation of Korean.

5. "黃致列首張專輯銷量創 4 年來獨唱歌手新紀錄" (Huang Zhilie shouzhang zhuanji xiaoliang chuang 4 nian lai duchang geshou xin jilu, The sales of Hwang Ch'iyöl's first album created a new record for all solo artists in last four years), *Epoch Times*, 29 December 2017, <http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/17/12/19/n9973146.htm> (accessed on 12 July 2018).

6. "黃致列身價高漲 大陸演出費是韓國 100 倍" (Huang Zhilie shenjian gaozhang dalu yanchufei shi Hanguo 100 bei, Hwang Ch'iyöl's price for performance soars, performance price in Mainland China is 100 times that in South Korea), *Chinanews*, 12 April 2016, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/zy/2016-04-12/doc-ixrcizu4036522.shtml> (accessed on 12 July 2018).

7. Thekpopwriter, "Big Bang's 'Bang Bang Bang' wins Hwang Chi Yeol 1st place on Chinese 'I Am a Singer'", *allkpop*, 6 February 2016, <https://www.allkpop.com/article/2016/02/big-bangs-bang-bang-wins-hwang-chi-yeol-1st-place-on-chinese-i-am-a-singer> (accessed on 20 July 2019).

8. "Hwang Chi Yeol Took the First Place on Chinese version of 'I Am a Singer 4,'" *BNTNews*, 2 June 2016, <https://www.msn.com/en-my/news/other/hwang-chi-yeol-took-the-first-place-on-chinese-version-of-%E2%80%98i-am-a-singer%E2%80%99/ar-BBpbOPq> (accessed on 20 July 2019).

9. "黃致列翻唱的 'Bang Bang Bang' 水平如何?" (Huang Zhilie fanchang de "Bang Bang Bang" shuiping ruhe?, How is Hwang Ch'iyöl's cover of "Bang Bang Bang"), *China Daily*, 3 March 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/interface/toutiaonew/53002523/2016-03-03/cd_23728446.html (accessed on 29 January 2018).

The Deleuzian concept of collective assemblage is helpful here to understand the multiplicity in the musical performances, as well as in our daily life of de-territorialisation. As Deleuze and Guattari contend, “there is a collective assemblage of enunciation, a machinic assemblage of desire, one inside the other and both plugged into an immense outside that is a multiplicity in any case” (1987: 23). This music television program, either the Korean original or the Chinese remake, has been set up to be plugged into an “outside” in which multiplicity is the inevitable norm, reflecting a machinic assemblage of desire for multiplying and connecting outside. The pronunciation of the lyrics was less driven by phonetic accuracy and more mixed in a blurriness in which language barriers do not play any important role in connecting audiences. The most efficient part in terms of communication in the performance, however, is conveyed by the lyrics – “bang bang bang” – which are void of meaning outside of their onomatopoeic function. Nevertheless, the “bang bang bang” is meaningful in that it is carried out through visual modes of communication that abet de-territorialising the linguascape.

Language implies a certain structure or code (Bauman and Briggs 2003; Makoni and Pennycook 2005). To acknowledge what Derrida calls the “untranslatable” is a post-structuralist escape from the “violence of representation” (Derrida 2000). Lie points out that even in music, the so-called “universal language,” there still exists a “resistance to a foreign-language lyric” (Lie 2012). Foreigners are the ones from a different culture speaking different languages. When one culture, in the course of engaging with another culture, requires the foreigner to speak the host language, the host culture performs violence as a host. This so-called hospitality is conditional; as Jacques Derrida suggests, it forces foreigners to be one of “us” and thus “violently erases the heterogeneity of others” (Derrida 2000). The uttering of the quasi-nonsense “bang bang bang” is both a foreigners’ revolt against violent conditional hospitality and the host’s open acceptance of the foreigners’ utterings. Language is not a transparent medium; rather, it is constructed, if not manipulated, by various intentions within the nation-state apparatus. By both acknowledging human linguistic diversity and staying alert to the agenda of control through language, the uttering of the meaningless yet meaningful “bang bang bang” in Hwang’s performance opens a window of connecting audiences free of cohesive violence. Thus, I venture to propose that the de-territorialising linguascape in the Sino-Korean engagement of musical TV shows is a reconstruction of a world order through nonofficial language – a new world order reimagined through the apparatus of screen, one that is decentred, eliminating barriers for communication and establishing visual relations through which audiences achieve a vernacular relationship to one another. It is an order in which affective qualities mediate the relationships between the audiences. The live and offscreen audiences are related and communicate with each other, experiencing affective interactions that traverse on- and offscreen environments.

Relative to verbal dialogue, while music requires less translational intervention, the problem of translating lyrics remains nonetheless. In the musical program *I Am a Singer*, both The One and Hwang Ch’iyöl’s bilingual or trilingual songs were translated and subtitled for broadcasting. However, the 500 live audience members who actually voted on the contestants were not provided with any translation. Nevertheless, they rejoiced in the experience of sensorial immersion. The lack of translation apparently did not dampen their appreciation of the show. As his online fandom comments: “why this is a need to differentiate nationality” and “language doesn’t matter, just believe in your ears.”¹⁰ The Chinese audiences were able to greet the Korean performances with hospitality free of linguistic violence, and it

is this hospitality that lies at the centre of empathetic feeling-togetherness. Only when hostility is removed can this feeling be cultivated. Although neoliberal economic interdependence in the global capitalist economy has been significantly shaping the cultural interactions between Korea and China, it would still be too presumptuous to reduce the complex relationships between nations and humans to the economy. As Lawrence Grossberg argues, “by assuming it is always and all about the economy (stupid!), it renders invisible other developments that are equally important and equally troubling” (2012: 59). The economy does not provide answers to everything. It is when the border-crossing exchanges occur in the general public’s everydayness that exchanges can be penetrative into each other culture’s milieu and so might possibilities for wholesome, reciprocal relationships emerge. I believe that the trivialities of everyday life for the general public was also on Sheldon H. Lu’s mind when he suggested that “postsocialism is everyday life” and “postsocialism pertains to perception and affects” (2007: 209). This is not about grand ideologies or state-sanctioned narratives; rather, it is about the *affect* of the interactions and negotiations in the general public’s everyday interactions. In the affect, true communication is possible. Echoing Grossberg, Appadurai’s “community of sentiment” (Appadurai 1990) is a group that begins “to imagine and feel things together, because of the condition of collective reading, criticism, and pleasure” (Appadurai 1996: 8). Music has long been a medium for expressing people’s hidden longings, pouring out their emotions, and bearing their hopes. Transnational fandom is built on the shared affective experiences generated when watching the show, and reinforced further in intentional communities formed to express and share sorrow, joy, sadness, happiness, fury, and the dissatisfaction of partially understanding the multilingual lyrics. Such moments suggest an acknowledgement of linguistic pluralism and a playful mechanization in the form of entertainment. “Glossolalia” – speaking in tongues – (Heller-Roazer 2014: 594) becomes a way to communicate in the individual domain through the co-consumption of collaborative screen culture, wherein standard official languages are absent.

Language shapes thoughts, and thoughts guide actions. While officially sanctioned languages can be distorted by various prohibitions and proscriptions, singing through a hybridised language that is not officially constructed might perhaps create space for a new order within which official-sanctioned ideologies are deconstructed and sincere communication is possible. This is a process of building new order through language use that is mediated by the de-territorialising linguascape based on visual and intuitive modes of communication. This linguascape imagines a new ordering of various dimensions of language, culture, and ideology, and it reconstructs the ways that audiences speak, think, and act. The transnational musical TV program *I Am a Singer* enables both Chinese and Korean audiences to relate to each other and to project their affects, either positive or negative, on screen, thereby arousing their affective thinking of each other off screen. As Bliss Cua Lim raises, “the term market proximity refers to a close familiarity between one national-popular audience and another nation’s screen texts” (2009: 227). Beng Huat Chua also mentions that when the focus is on the urban space, Asian audiences more easily self-identify with Korean screen culture than with American screen culture (Chua 2004). To the audiences, the bodies of the celebrities become interchangeable bodies on screens, leading to an immersed experience. Consumers are geographically located in “cultural spaces” within which they bring their own cultural context to bear on the content of the imported product. As Chua contends, an audience

10. See note 2, about online comments made by audiences.

member is capable of “transcend(ing) his or her grounded nationality to forge abstract identification” (*ibid.*: 227). It is crucial that this abstract identification constructs communities of sentiment, and that in the process, audiences sing, view, read, feel, and communicate through a system of visual relations that crosses barriers. As Appadurai notes, “neighbourhoods are designed to be instances and exemplars of a generalised mode of belonging to a wider territorial imaginary.” Therefore, a transnational imagined community is potentially forming; as Appadurai writes, “neighbourhood as context produces the context of neighbourhoods” (1996: 191). A community of sentiment has been shaped by the amplified dynamics of unrelenting de-territorialisation where national culture has developed into a hybridised form.

Border-crossing interactions incite accompanying frictions, especially in the context of geographical proximity and cultural similarity. In the case of co-consuming a musical TV show, community is built upon a shared affective experience, though it is important to note that affect does not necessarily suggest a utilitarian pleasurable experience. This is so not only because negative emotional qualities (presentation of pain, sorrow, and frustration) are involved in exchanges within the linguascope, but also because these negative affects result from the fact that the nation-state is not obsolete. Official governmental political amity can always serve as the munificent prerequisite to the market interchange that is represented in television and other visual forms of cultural exchange between China and Korea. The Chinese remake of *I Am a Singer* triumphantly rolled out five seasons from 2013 to 2016. Nevertheless, since the Chinese State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SAPPRFT) placed a ban on Korean popular culture and Korean performers due to the US missile system Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in August 2016, the sixth season of *I Am a Singer* was forced to be renamed *Singer*, in order to take more distance from the original Korean version.¹¹ Korean singers are no longer invited on the show. The state’s intervention on Hunan TV through surveillance and censorship also made casting more difficult. At the beginning of the sixth season, the program director Tao Hong burst into tears while giving his opening remarks. He choked with sobs as he said: “I tried my best. We really did our best to try to invite those singers you expected to come. This is all I can say.”¹² The exact reason for this difficulty in casting is unknown, although it is clear from this incident that the affects delivered through the musical TV show are not only comprised of positive sentiments and optimistic indulgence. In 2019, Hwang Ch’iyöl’s comments about Chinese polluted air and poor-tasting water on the 23 January Korean MBC variety TV program *Radio Star* became the top search on Weibo, inciting a backlash among many in the Chinese audience. Hwang was accused of mocking China while being supported by his Chinese fans. It remains unclear whether this backlash was led by Chinese media that stirred up fury with malicious interpretation or resulted from, as Korean media claims, improper translation of Hwang’s words.¹³ Dissonant affects and thoughtful reflection can be raised. This controversy has brought in the issue of linguistic transaction wherein official language can be constructed or even manipulated by state-sanctioned intentions. The role of nation-state intervention is still a crucial question in transnational cultural exchanges. In his book *Spreadable Media*, Henry Jenkins raises this point:

The transnational circulation of media may be the most fragile, given the geopolitical and economic complexities of the situations we are discussing. However, we do believe that the informal spread of media content through networked communications may circumnavigate if not circumvent some of the factors (political, legal, economic, cultural) which have allowed U.S. mass media to maintain its dominance

throughout much of the twentieth century (2013: 261).

Jenkins observes the fragility of the transnational circulation of media, and yet he still credits a great deal to the spreadability of commercial mass media, arguing that the role spreadable media has played is perhaps “the most powerful force in our collective cultural lives” (*ibid.*: 259). Hye-seung Chung and David S. Diffrient question this optimistic assumption based on media spreadability in *Movie Migrations* (2015). Nevertheless, I would like to proffer at this juncture that it is this very spreadability that allows access to one another across boundaries facilitated by the shifting linguascope in the general public’s everyday lives. Linguascope is proposed as a site where affective negotiation for communication rises above the violence of official languages rather than forthrightly fighting against it. Linguascope functions as a negotiation instead of confrontation, as a torturous revolt within the state-sanctioned narratives. *I Am a Singer*, for instance, is still shaped by the hegemonic use of *putonghua* (普通話, Mandarin) while (re)semanticisation is communicated through alterative linguascope.

In “a potentially volatile policy environment”¹⁴ such as mainland China, accessibility is the first step towards being knowable and comprehensible. Just as hip hop has become highly politicised as a dominant music genre in the US, Chinese audiences also seek musical affective negotiation to project their longings, pour out their emotions, and merge into a transnational context, all without touching the political red line. While Childish Gambino’s *This is America* was awarded the Grammy Award for Song of the Year in 2019, it is hard to imagine that something like *This is China* could even survive in the Chinese environment, let alone receive an industry-wide award. In fact, in order to integrate into the global musicscape, many countries rolled out their own version of *This is America*, one of which was indeed *This is China*. Nevertheless, the video only survived for three minutes on Weibo. Within this context, the original Korean musical TV program (with of course some politicised parts) provides a model for Chinese musical programs that is compatible with China’s transitioning identity and consumption patterns in the contemporary market economy. This practice of selective export in return helps the original Korean musical TV show itself be capable of connecting with or “plugging into” others’ cultural milieus. This incorporation has facilitated cultural de-territorialisation where shared life experiences and emotional qualities can flourish, creating regional muscscapes not dominated by US influence.

In the case of the Chinese remake of *I am a Singer*, which is primarily

11. The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SAPPRFT, 2013-2018). It was named the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) from 1998 to 2013.

12. Tao Hong (dir.), *Singer*, in the episode broadcasted on 16 January 2018.

13. See for instance: “中國又被韓國明星‘羞辱’了? 網友評論却分成兩派” (Zhongguo you bei Hangguo mingxing ‘xiuru’ le? Wangyou pinglun que fencheng liang pai, China has been “humiliated” by Korean stars again? Netizens’ comments are divided into two factions), *Reference News*, 25 January 2019, <https://news.sina.com.cn/c/2019-01-25/doc-ihqfskcp0418292.shtml> (accessed on 15 July 2019); “黃致列為‘吐糟中國’道歉 韓電視臺: 只是翻譯的問題, 不需要道歉” (Huang Zhilie wei ‘tucao Zhongguo’ daoqian Han dianshitai: Zhi shi fanyi de wenti, bu xuyao daoqian, Hwang Ch’iyöl apologizes for “mocking China,” Korean TV station: it’s just a translation problem, no need to apologise), *Guancha Syndicate*, 18 January 2019, http://www.guancha.cn/international/2019_01_28_488452.shtml (accessed on 15 July 2019); “황치열 ‘중국 공기 안 좋아’ 발언 사과... ‘오해의 소지 있어’” (Hwang Ch’iyöl, “chungguk konggi an choa parön sagwa...” ohaeu soji issö, Hwang Ch’iyöl apologises for his comments on “Chinese poor-quality air...” there is a misunderstanding), *Star Tour*, 26 January 2019, <https://www.mk.co.kr/star/hot-issues/view/2019/01/54526/> (accessed on 15 July 2019); and “After Hwang Chi-yeul’s apology, Korean media accuses Chinese netizens of cyberbullying,” *DramaPanda*, 28 January 2019, <http://www.drapanda.com/2019/01/after-hwang-chi-yeuls-apology-korean.html> (accessed on 17 July 2019).

14. Brian Yecies calls the Chinese “a potentially volatile policy environment” through an observation of transnational collaboration in the Chinese film industry (2016: 236).

watched on Chinese streaming websites instead of official television stations, the show provides Chinese audiences with an alternative way to enjoy everyday leisure across borders, generating a space within which Chinese audiences can watch and compare the original shows and Chinese remakes. Online discussions of these musical shows on Internet blogs have changed TV consumption from a linear practice into a multilingual, multidirectional, and interactive experience. In this process, the shifting linguascape plays a significant role in facilitating audiences' need for synchronicity and in removing language barriers within exchanges, resulting in the forging of a virtual transnational community of common ordinariness. This everydayness comes to fruition in the combination of musical television programs, where the shifting linguascape of the lyrics transforms sung music into a universal language, and into television, which offers affordable and private leisure available at any time. Together, they reshape audiences' everyday lives.

New possibilities can only be made through new investments. New investments require a reimagining, including a contextualisation of all the multiplicities and alternatives and a turning away from making arbitrary conclusions and (re)producing binary extremes. One of the compelling consequences of *hallyu* is that its global fandom has illuminated a transnational vision, one that opens new possibilities, while also abetting Koreans' national pride and other nations' resistance to nationalism. In an attempt to produce a new ideology under an inherited dichotomy, the result would merely be the reproduction of the old. In contrast, to question the state-sponsored narrative via the screen culture apparatus would be a more productive start. In the age of globalisation, one of the predominant themes in the Sino-Korean conjuncture is the tension between nationalism and transnationalism. The Chinese practice of importing or mimicking Korean TV programs and the backlash against the practice are forms of “resistance” and “affinity.” Particularly in a globalising China, the old ideologies and new commercial imperatives are at odds. The rapid growth of the new economy since the 1990s has undermined traditional and revolutionary ideologies, as a result of what Jason McGrath terms the radical transition “from heteronomy to autonomy” (McGrath 2008). At the moment of transition towards autonomy, Deborah S. Davis also points out that consumer patterns have changed at an interpersonal level in everyday sociability after the reform era in a more commodified and marketized China (Davis 2000). The autonomy of consumption was granted, while the post-revolutionary empty spaces of entertainment and the general publics' leisure lives in China have yet to be filled. All-powerful capitalist consumerism and commercialism have challenged the revolutionary mentality and the socialist ideology among the general public. Media productions play a central role in this process.

The Chinese remake of *I Am a Singer*, featuring Korean singers and their multilingual songs, helps to meet the need to blur linguistic boundaries. Such a practice is motivated by the dual purposes of producing a sensational TV show and diversifying the landscape of a performing stage in the globalised screen cultural arena. The collaborative media productions and co-consumption practices of this music television show among Chinese and Korean audiences suggest that common ground is possible. Traffic mediated by screen culture flows across barriers and boundaries in a fluid form of storytelling, within which the demand for collapsing lyrical barriers is correspondingly rising as a newly constructed aesthetic sensibility. The One and Hwang Ch'iyöl's multilingual performances have reshaped the linguascape of the program, satisfied audiences' craving for crossing borders (as the new aesthetic demands), and reconfigured a new global order arranged around the everyday life experience of the general public.

Conclusion: Towards a be-coming community

New aesthetic modes arise and bond transnational consumers as is the case, for example, in musical TV programs. Even so, it would be too hasty to draw a conclusion about cosmopolitan pop. Like the anti-Korean wave fomented by the Chinese state, the invention of the nation-state is deeply linked with cultural interactions, including the de-territorialising linguascape. Youngmin Choe argues that being distracted from nation-state sponsored narratives could be a “productive distraction” (2016). Derrida likewise questions the validity of “hospitality” towards foreigners as a host (2000), and as Appadurai argues, culturalism inherently involves ethnic violence, or “identity politics mobilised at the level of the nation-state” (1996: 15). The ability to be hospitable lies in the ability to be the host. This identity of host is granted by the government. Thus, in order to maintain being a host, there are responsibilities that need to be fulfilled, such as obeying governmental surveillance and communication via official languages. Paradoxically, the state's intervention becomes the precondition for being a host, although the responsibility of hosting requires that hospitality be offered, sometimes in violation of the state's requirements. In this sense, a genuine “face to face encounter,” to borrow Emmanuel Levinas's term (1985), would make it difficult to maintain a reality where violence is perpetuated.

The invention of the third party, the state, not only in the form of intervention and surveillance, but also in the language system it constructs for the purposes of propaganda under the veil of national identification, has destroyed the primal and purist ethical relationship between the Other and the self. Giorgio Agamben's insights shed light on the ontological basis of friendship by drawing on Aristotle's theory that friends “share the same sweetness of existing” (2006: 33). This affective experience, this feeling together, leads people toward (re)constructing a community with the future in mind. The shared experience of co-sensing the music, sound, lights, and images in the same TV programs on screen fosters richer understandings across cultures. All these visual modes help to build a system of visual relations in which spectators are able to relate to each other across borders. The musical show *I Am a Singer* allows local audiences to identify themselves and offers them a comparative perspective that permits audiences to “speak” to each other, albeit not in standardised official languages. This provides a channel for an empathetic appreciation of the other. The shifting linguascape is an imagination not of a common language, but of powerful multiplicities. It is a reimagination of the general public speaking in tongues to shake off the ideological and structural shackles of the state-sanctioned language system.

Achieving this community is also related to Levinas's “serving to the other,” wherein one feels compelled to get to know the “other” culture (1985). In Lawrence Grossberg's words, getting to know the other would be an ethical responsibility that needs to be fulfilled. He argues that ethical commitment is to the other, to belonging together with the other. As he puts it, “my own ethical sense is constituted as an obligation to an other (...) the other is what can only be imagined – as a coming community (...) it is there that ethics and politics, practice and desire, meet” (2010: 100). The (re) construction of this transnational be-coming of community has been shaped by the dynamics of both division and integration. Thus, it would be more pragmatic to frame discourse about this be-coming community in a future tense. In East Asia, this be-coming community is relevant to Choe's proposal of Asianisation in terms of feeling together in an “affect community.” Choe argues for a “self-reflective perspective for viewing the complexities – its anxieties, tensions, and celebratory gestures – of a new East Asian affective

economy" (2016: 7). This affective economy requires us to resituate the co-productions and remakes within East Asia in a more affective sense in terms of feeling together. Choe further points out that the "exchange of products and capital [is in] a sense of what Giorgio Agamben refers to as the 'con-sent' at the heart of friendship" (*ibid.*). In the East Asian affective being-togetherness, this "con-sent" is not only embodied by increasingly interdependent economic engagement, but is also embedded in the rising regional cultural identity and co-consumption of popular culture as a shared experience and feeling in the everyday life and trivialities of the general public.

Both Korean and Chinese audiences across borders share affective experiences because of the transnational co-productions and remakes that mediate collective affects. These collective affects portray transnational relations through a relatively de-politicalised form of entertainment. Both the original and the remake seek intertextual survival in the land of each other's "brotherhood," where linguistic pluralism and political tension are

perpetuated. As the affective negations are never finalised in the shifting linguallandscape, the formation of the community beyond the nation-state is also be-coming. The potentiality of transplantability in Korean screen culture contributes to structuring a be-coming community, even as we insist on our hope of its be-coming.

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