

‘With the Love Left By the Dragon’: A discussion on the political discourse in Hong Kong through comparing protest songs from 1970s to 2010s

流行樂曲與香港的政治想像

Analysis

1970s -1980s

During the early years from the late 1970s towards the 1980s, Cantonpop songs were filled by patriotism, expressing Hong Kongers' proud to be a member of the Chinese community. Symbols related to Chinese identity, such as the dragon (龍), was frequently mentioned.

By the end of the 80s, a cumulative want to bring liberalism and democracy to the whole Chinese community became strong. Songs in this time frequently inferred to a common struggle between brothers 'walking on the same path' or 'struggling together'.

1990s

National sentiment per wailed, but it never fulfilled - the dream of a liberated pan-Chinese community seemed shattered. Cantonpop throughout 1990s was filled by melancholy, lamenting the backwardness of traditional Chinese values and the their impotent people - 'not dare to challenge the sky/god (天)'. Some songs also took up a more cynicist attitude as one keeps repeating 'everything visible is empty, everything empty is visible (色即是空 空即是色)' - a famous Buddhist saying!

2010s

The student movement in 2014 mobilized massive students and intellectuals, developed, from a discourse of fear, melancholy and desperation into a mobilizing discourse that 'if we failed to fight the last fight, we will lose a Hong Kong that is free and democratic forever'. A new identity emerged and consolidated on the specialty of 'Hong Kong people' while the used-to-be proud 'Chinese' identity was not even mentioned. A branch of anti-mainland 'localist' activism also emerged.

What will happen next?

Research Outline

Cultural theorists such as Theodor Adorno regard popular culture as a mere mechanical production of modern capitalism. They only reproduce styles and lack real creativity. 'Meaning is dead', said Adorno, on mass culture.

'Cantonpop' refers to 'popular' songs sang in 'Cantonese'. This category of songs widely draws on topics like urban love stories, break up sadness and everyday kind of feelings. This kind of music is commonly regarded as a successful model of modern music industry in Hong Kong due to its highly capitalized production process.

But are these true? My research conducted close discourse analysis of Cantonpop songs from 1970s to 2010s that are political or protesting in nature (this turns out to be a significant volume). And **I want to challenge the above idea that popular music only reflects capitalist and industrial interest.**

My analysis shows that popular songs do not only reflect what is going on in reality, but are also channels to convey political ideas and narratives. Further more, they take part in constructing and re-constructing these ideas and allow them to echo among a wide range of audience.

The changing discourse in Cantonpop between 1970s and 2010s also demonstrates how **political narratives and communal identity are not fixed products** once history has created them. They are largely mobile and subject to change.

“With the love left by the dragon, we open up the thousand-year **Chinese** road to destiny”

“You and I are thousands of miles in distance, but have the same mark inscribed **in our blood.**”

“Hand in hand”

“These three left-behind members had their bodies burnt in the fire tonight”

“The **fate** does not allow questioning”

“Everything visible is **empty**, everything visible is **empty**”

“Cheated and trapped”

“We are not fearless, but more afraid if there will **be no more chance** to cry after this night”

“To be an egg hitting the wall, or a Lamb enslaved forever?”

“If you trust children's tales, there is still hope to see **white horses** on the skyline.”