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Rock is Not Revolution, Part II

Chris Heselton
University of California, Irvine

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[For Part I of this series, see Chris Heselton’s post from 12/23/08.]
By Chris Heselton

One of the early rock musicians to make the jump to mainstream and become a household name was Xu Wei. His popularity is probably due to a style that some have called Chinese country or folk rock. This style does not have the explosive rage of heavy metal that many in the popular audience find hard to accept. Instead, the Xu Wei style is a more calm and relaxing melodic rock. One of the distinguishing characteristics of Xu Wei’s music is how similar it is to many of the romantic and nostalgic lyrical themes of pop music. Hometown (故乡, 2000), one of his best known songs and one often sung in Karaoke (KTV) bars, has many of these typical romantic and lament-filled lyrics seen in pop music. This is the kind of lyrical and musical style that wins broad acceptance in 21st century Chinese society:

The setting sun on the horizon shines again upon my face
Reflecting again that restless heart of mine.
What place is this still so desolate as before
This endless journey goes so slowly.

I am eternally heading towards a distant place – a lonely wanderer
You are amongst a vast sea of people – my woman
On the road in a strange village during a wintry night,
This thought harms me like knife.

Always in my dreams I see your two helpless eyes
And then my heart is again awakened
I stand here thinking about the scene when you once parted (with me)
You standing among the crowd, so lonely.
That’s your broken heart.
My heart is truly so maddened.

In my heart, you are forever the “hometown.”
 Alone, you always abided and silently awaited me.
On the road in a strange village during a wintry night,
This thought harms me like knife.

Always in my dreams I see your two helpless eyes
And then my heart is again awakened
I stand here thinking about the scene when you once parted (with me)
You standing among the crowd, so lonely.
That is your broken heart.
My heart is truly so maddened.

Always in my dreams I see your two helpless eyes.
And then my heart is again awakened.
Always in my dream I see you walking on the road back home.
You stand below the setting sun, looking so magnificent.
That’s your dress flapping freely.
That’s your grace like the water.

天边夕阳再次映上我的脸庞
再次映着我那不安的心
这是什么地方依然是如此的荒凉
那无尽的旅程如此漫长
我是永远向着远方独行的浪子
你是茫茫人海之中我的女人
在异乡的路上每一个寒冷的夜晚
这思念它如刀让我伤痛
总是在梦里我看到你无助的双眼
我的心又一次被唤醒
我站在这里想起和你曾经离别情景
你站在人群中间那么孤单
那是你破碎的心
我的心却那么狂野
你在我心里永远是故乡
你总为我独自守候沉默等待
在异乡的路上每一个寒冷的夜晚
这思念它如刀让我伤痛
总是在梦里我看到你无助的双眼
我的心又一次被唤醒
总是在梦里看到自己走在归乡路上
你站在夕阳下面容娇艳
那是你衣裙漫飞
那是你温柔如水

Currently, one of the more popular mainstream rock groups is the Taiwanese band May Day. This group is probably the quintessential pop-rock group in the Chinese-language music world. This group proudly touts its image as an energetic high-spirited college band that sings, principally, about love. Their popular songs such as *Eternal Stars of Eternal Hearts* (恆心的恆星), *Embrace* (擁抱), and *Tenderness* (溫柔) all play on romantic themes yet have a clear pop-rock feel to the instrumentals. In many ways, May Day is no different from many Chinese boy bands except the rock instrumentals. However, sometimes their origins as a college rock band can be heard. The cover song for their first album, *Long Live Love* (愛情萬歲), may surprise listeners that it does not sing about love, but promiscuity and emotional detachment – uncommon in Chinese pop music but not hard to find in rock.

I need the warmth of you body
Although at this moment I don’t feel the least bit cold.
I feel an enormous hunger.
Although full with boredom – expanding my soul.
Requited love cannot cause again "the kingdom and the city to collapse",[1]
But collapse your emotions, (your emotions) are getting colder, a firm soul.

At this moment, don’t wait any longer,
Don’t wait anymore. Don’t wait anymore. Let the passion get cold.
Just let me kiss you, kiss you, kiss you, until the sky gets bright.
Just let me try on your clothes and then your underwear.
Just let me kiss you, kiss you, kiss you, until the sky gets bright.
Just let me explore you deep deep deepest place – your secret.
Just let me kiss you, kiss you, kiss you, until the sky gets bright.
Just let me try on your clothes and then your underwear.
Just let me kiss you, kiss you, kiss you, until the sky gets bright.
Don’t wait any longer for the truth that has not once befallen.
Before the day break,
I just want to...
Play with you as much as I can.

I don’t care about your name.
Your tomorrow, your past, you’re just a man or woman.
I'm clear about that.
I don’t plan to leave you, but I also don’t plan to really love you.
Requited love cannot cause the kingdom and the city to collapse,
But collapse your emotions, (now your emotions) are getting colder, (becoming) a firm soul.

At this moment, don’t wait any longer,
Don’t wait anymore. Don’t wait anymore. Let the passion get cold.
Just let me kiss you, kiss you, kiss you, until the sky gets bright.
Just let me try on your clothes and then your underwear.
Just let me kiss you, kiss you, kiss you, until the sky gets bright.
Just let me explore you deep deep deepest place – your secret.
Just let me kiss you, kiss you, kiss you, until the sky gets bright.
Just let me try on your clothes and then your underwear.
Just let me kiss you, kiss you, kiss you, until the sky gets bright.
Don’t wait any longer for the truth that has not once befallen.
Before the day break,
I just want to...
Play with you as much as I can.

我需要你的体温
虽然此刻我一点也不觉得寒冷
我感到巨大的饥饿
虽然无聊满满的撑涨我的灵魂
相恋不能再倾国倾城
倾倒你心里越来越冷坚固的灵魂
此刻你也别再等

不能再等不能再等让热情变冷
就让我吻你吻你吻你直到天明
就让我穿过你的外衣然后你的内衣
就让我吻你吻你吻你直到天明
就让我刺探你最深深处你的秘密
就让我吻你吻你吻你直到天明
就让我穿过你的外衣然后你的内衣
就让我吻你吻你吻你直到天明
别再等待不曾降临的真理
黎明之前
只要和你
尽情嬉戏

我不在乎你的姓名
你的明天你的过去你是男是女
我是如此的清醒
不打算离去也不打算真的爱你
相恋不能再倾国倾城
倾倒你心里越来越冷坚固的灵魂

此刻你也别再等
不能再等不能再等让热情变冷
就让我吻你吻你吻你直到天明
就让我穿过你的外衣然后你的内衣
就让我吻你吻你吻你直到天明
就让我探索你最深深处你的秘密
就让我吻你吻你吻你直到天明
就让我穿过你的外衣然后你的内衣
就让我吻你吻你吻你直到天明
别再等待不曾降临的真理
黎明之前
只要和你
尽情嬉戏

In the early days of Chinese rock, there is clearly an emphasis on originality. In many ways, older songs of the day simply couldn’t express the meanings these bands wanted to put out for their generation. For Chinese pop music, the emphasis is more on melody, and for many romantic songs, the message is pretty universal. Sometimes remaking a classic can be a sure seller that has a guaranteed accepted melody and message. Recently, Chinese rock has also taken on this trend as well with everything from Zheng Jun remaking the classic Why are the Flowers Thusly Red? (花儿为什么这样红？) to Cui Jian’s perversion of Teresa Teng (鄧麗君) classics like Small Town Story (小城故事). More interesting is the emergence of the “translation version” (翻版) of many foreign songs. It is extremely common in Chinese pop music to take songs from the American and Japanese musical traditions and merely to retranslate or re-conceptualize the lyrics. Chinese rock music has also begun to follow suit. The popular mainstream rock artist Zheng Jun (郑钧) has made several remakes and “translation versions” as well as his own original works. Many American rockers may recognize this remake of Coldplay’s song Yellow translated into Chinese as Falling Star (流星):

I want to know how long can a falling star fly
Is its beauty worth pursuing or not

The flowers of the night sky, are scattered behind you
Giving me long lasting happiness. It’s worth going to wait for.
So my heart runs like mad from dusk till dawn.
I cannot bear it again.
Willing myself to descend upon your hands
Transforming into the rainbow of the black night.
The insects become the breeze of the moon light – become the breeze of the moon light
I leap from my body – leap into your river
I swim all the way to the end. It’s so free there.

I make a wish, I make a wish to protect
And set my heart still at the most beautiful moment.
Willing myself to descend upon your hands
Transforming into the rainbow of the black night.
Willing myself to never see again the radiance of the sky.

Happiness leaps into your river
Swims all the way to the end
(It) leaps into your river. I make a wish to protect
At the most beautiful moment, I make a wish.
I want to know how long can a falling star fly.
Giving me long lasting happiness.

我想知道流星能飞多久
它的美丽是否值得去寻求

夜空的花散落在你身后
幸福了我很久值得去等候
于是我心狂奔从黄昏到清晨
不能再承受

情愿缀落在你手中
羽化成黑夜的彩虹
蜕变成月光的清风成月光的清风
我纵身跳跳进你的河流
一直游到尽头那里多自由

我许个愿我许个愿保佑
让我的心凝固在最美的时候
情愿缀落在你手中
羽化成黑夜的彩虹
情愿不再见明媚的天

幸运跳进你的河流一直游到尽头
跳进你的河 我许个愿保佑
在最美的时候我许的愿
我想知道流星能飞多久
幸福了我很久

[1] A Chinese idiom that refers to how beautiful women can cause the kingdom to collapse. Similar, in many ways, to the idea of Helene of Troy.

*Chris Heselton is a graduate student at the University of California, Irvine.*

*Tags: Chinese music*