



East Wind Breaks: Identification of *Zhongguofeng* Music as a Form of “Chinese Crossover” and “Hybrid Thinking” in Contemporary Mandopop

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Abstract

Since 2000, the phenomenal rise of Jay Chou, an iconic pop artist from Taiwan, has evoked discussions on Mandopop scene. This study aims to conduct a micro-analysis of selected music samples from Chou between 2000 and 2010 in order to identify *Zhongguofeng* music, which employs Phillip Tagg’s music analysis theory. The findings find out that Chou’s musical works demonstrate substantial Chinese elements in terms of lyrics, melody, and music cultural references. In addition, they reflect diversified musical styles, infusing Chinese-style hybridity into popular music. As a result, these musical works have formed a unique *Zhongguofeng* music standard that could play a defining role in contemporary Mandopop. It is anticipated that a discourse with a specific analytical setting could be established in this study. It can offer an insight into how the framework of hybridity in contemporary Mandopop is used to overcome the borders of genres, geopolitics, narratives, and negotiation of cultural identity between the “local” and the “global”.

Keywords: popular music; Mandopop; *Zhongguofeng*; crossover; hybridity

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INTRODUCTION

Chinese popular music, or Mandopop, is deemed to have originated in the 1930s from Shanghai’s *Shidaiqu* 时代曲, which was initially influenced by jazz. This popular music scene was disrupted by World War II and civil wars before 1949, prompting a divergence of Chinese popular music history that took place in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China separately but not entirely disconnectedly. Despite its complex development across

Greater China over the decades, Mandopop, as a whole, has not declined but has been enriched. Drawing on different genres and stylistic characteristics adapted or integrated from music across the Chinese border, Mandopop reflects a flourishing scene in the Sinophone world. Since the millennium, Jay Chou Chieh-lun 周杰伦 has undoubtedly become one of the best-selling pop artists in contemporary Mandopop. Being a representative icon of modern Chinese popular music and a conscious advocate of *Zhongguofeng* 中国风

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through his music, Chou has produced 15 music albums that embody boundless creativity and imagination in terms of lyrics, rhythm, melody, arrangement, and music themes. The unique conceptions and rich musical contents of his works have been well-received several audiences in the Sino-ophone world, particularly the millennial generation. These works embody the sense of Chinese belonging to their traditional culture, and singer-songwriters, represented by Chou, have become the mainstream of contemporary Mandopop (Chow, 2013; De Kloet, 2010; Ho & Law, 2012; Lin, 2020; Wang, 2012).

An essential factor contributing to the popularity of Chou's *Zhongguofeng*-style music is its fusion of Western popular music with Oriental imagery, making him one of the leaders of modern music trends that defined contemporary Mandopop throughout his 23-year music career. Some scholars claim that the musical characteristics of Chou's works had a catalytic effect on the development of Chinese popular music, the "inheritance" of Oriental culture, and the "promotion" of Chinese national culture (Lin, 2013; Wu *et al.*, 2013).

From the late 1980s, Mandopop entered an era of rapid development, driven by the production system that marked the genesis of the internationalisation of the Mandopop industry (Tsai *et al.*, 2020, p. 8). The audience of Mandopop's esthetics has undergone major changes, shaped by the fusion of various cultures. Numerous studies have been conducted on Chou's works. For example, Fung (2008) explored how Chou's works reflect the integration of Chinese culture within the Western popular music genre and how he emerged as an icon and branding image, especially gaining recognition from the governmental authorities in Mainland China. Ho (2010) investigated the common understanding of listeners from different cultural backgrounds by examining their responses to Chou's songs. Zaborowska (2012) described the development of Chinese popular music and its relevance to Chinese culture, mentioning the influence of Chou and

his musical style and listing some specific features of Chinese popular music. Lin and Um (2017) used Chou's song "Blue and White Porcelain" to examine the *Zhongguofeng* elements of contemporary Mandopop, aiming to explore the Chineseness of the young audience. Furthermore, Lin (2020) selected Chou's *Zhongguofeng*-style songs as a case study of the integration of popular music and traditional culture, as well as Chou's contribution to Chinese popular music. This implies that in the discussion of the development of Mandopop that incorporates *Zhongguofeng*-style music, Chou and his musical works are indispensable, and the significance of his contribution cannot be neglected or discounted in the scholarship of Chinese popular music.

This study aims to identify *Zhongguofeng* music as an integral part of Mandopop, especially through Chou's works, which have been widely regarded as significant in Mandopop during the first decade of the 21st century. Additionally, this qualitative research examines the phenomenon of the *Zhongguofeng* style through an analytical framework rooted in Phillip Tagg's (1982) popular music analysis theory, with an expected outcome that reflects the "Chinese crossover" and "hybrid thinking" that are evident in artistic works by Chinese artists in the contemporary era. With an atypical theory and a method that focuses on music analysis, this analytical framework extracts features from Chou's works between 2000 and 2010, exploring and analysing the form and characteristics of *Zhongguofeng* through t works and examining the crossover and hybrid thinking envisioned by Chou as a Chinese creator.

The concept of Chinese crossover in the context of contemporary Mandopop reflects the increasing globalisation of the popular music industry. It involves artists modifying their music, style, and marketing strategies to appeal to international audiences while preserving their Chinese cultural identity. This concept also transcends the temporal and spatial boundaries of Mandopop, which has conventionally



Figure 1. Process of song analysis.
(Adapted from Tagg’s music analysis theory)

been bordered within modern China, and contributes to the global diversity of popular music. On the other hand, hybrid thinking can be regarded as a practical framework that refers to the artistic practice that emphasises the blending of diverse cultural, musical, and stylistic elements within contemporary Mandopop. It acknowledges the rich tapestry of influences that shape Mandopop and highlights the genre’s fluidity and adaptability as it incorporates elements within and beyond the Sinophone world. Meanwhile, it signifies that any given contemporary popular music is not monolithic or of a static genre but is a dynamic space for cultural exchange and fusion, reflecting the increasingly globalised nature of contemporary popular music.

METHOD

This research draws on Tagg’s analytical theory of popular music to develop a framework (Figure 1). Tagg’s theory includes key components and qualitative techniques that combine musicology, se-

miotics, and cultural studies to provide a multidimensional view of popular music. This theory begins with the premise that music communicates through signs and symbols, with “signs” referring to any music element—melody, rhythm, lyrics, and instrumentation—that conveys meaning. The theory interprets how these musical elements evoke specific emotions, ideas, or cultural connotations. Moreover, it includes two analytical levels: discursive and musical. The levels enable an examination of lyrics and how they convey cultural information, which contributes to the understanding of stylistic features that define a particular genre or style.

Based on 17 songs selected for the analysis, we explain in detail the musical elements considered within the analytical framework. On the basis of our prior experience of the songs and our pre-existing understanding of the selected songs, we categorised and coded these songs in chronological order (Table 1). The components of *Zhongguofeng* elements existed in contemporary Mandopop are the main

Table 1. Song codes and titles of selected samples

Song Code	Song Title	Song Code	Song Title
A1	娘子Niangzi (2000)	B1	东风破Dong Feng Po (2003)
A2	双截棍Nunchucks (2001)	B2	发如雪Hair Like the Snow (2005)
A3	龙拳Fist of the Dragon (2002)	B3	千里之外Far Away (2006)
A4	爷爷泡的茶Grandpa’s Tea (2002)	B4	菊花台Chrysanthemum Terrace (2006)
A5	将军Checkmate (2004)	B5	青花瓷Blue and White Porcelain (2007)
A6	乱舞春秋Chaotic Dance (2004)	B6	兰亭序Lan Ting Xu (2008)
A7	本草纲目Chinese Herbal Manual (2006)	B7	烟花易冷Fading Away (2010)
A8	霍元甲Huo Yuan Chia (2006)		
A9	黄金甲Golden Armor (2006)		
A10	雨下一整晚Raining All Night (2010)		

objects, which is termed analysis object in this study. An emitter is a person or entity that expresses a musical idea that shapes the overall meaning and impact of a piece of music. Conversely, the receiver is the person or entity that perceives and interprets the musical communication generated by the emitter; the receiver plays an important role in determining how the song is understood and experienced. This analysis enables us to understand how the songs demonstrate the hybridisation of *Zhongguofeng* characteristics in Chinese popular music, with reference to the theory of globalisation.

Notably, previous research on *Zhongguofeng*-style music has often lacked musical analysis, primarily because *Zhongguofeng* is not considered a music genre with a specific format. Popular music is regarded as being for mass consumption and has become a main identifier of contemporary popular culture. However, some scholars, such as Cohen (1993) and Shuker (2013), have investigated the essential features of popular music and its impact on social-cultural development, especially in the context of cultural globalisation. Forman (2000) and Kotarba (2013) studied popular music in relation to its context or text, dealing primarily with cultural and social information conveyed through specific styles of popular music. However, sociologists and cultural scholars have failed to describe musical ontology, such as musical styles, sound patterns, genre characteristics, and musical parameters. Therefore, we incorporate analysis of popular music to bridge this gap; this distinguishes our study from traditional musicological research, which has predominantly focused on manuscripts or scores.

Sample Selection and Treatment

A total of 17 songs composed by Chou and his creation team between 2000 and 2010 were selected as music samples and they were coded. These songs have typical features and conform to the musical preferences of the Sinophone audience. Sample selection was based on our perso-

nal experience, and each sample was replayed at least five times during aural analysis. We deliberately used earphones for listening, without visuals, to avoid being impacted by visual aspects. To capture the key information, the music was paused while notes were written. According to the analysis framework developed in this study, each selected song was disassembled into components to present the main elements for analysis and discussion. The important points of samples after listening to, including key, style, chord/scale mode, instrument, and lyrics were noted. Tables 2 and 3 list the selected samples and demonstrate observations on specific musical elements for the analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Contemporary Mandopop Characteristics *The Characteristics of Popular Music*

The global production and dissemination of popular music reflect the characteristics of cultural fusion and diversity. Hybridity here refers to a musical "mixture" that incorporates identity politics, primarily involving racial and ethnic identity and its effects on culture (Middleton & Beebe, 2002). Additionally, the production of popular music and its dissemination strategy, from global to local levels, reflects the cross-boundary characteristics of cultures. The characteristics of popular music can be mainly summarised as popularity, commerciality, diversification, and rhythm and beats. Popularity is the basic attribute of popular music and is an inherent characteristic of popular songs. As a form of commercialised entertainment music for consumption, popular music reflects both diversity and commodity characteristics. Since popular music is a commodity, it also has general characteristics (Brown, 2008; Cohen, 1993), including ease of new product launch and rapid replacement. Meanwhile, rhythm and beats, melody appeal, and memorability are reflected in the creation and performance of popular music (Burns, 1987).

Table 2. Selection of songs with *Zhongguofeng* characteristics written by Jay Chou (2000–2010).

Song Code	Key	Stylistic Feature	Main Chord	Instrument (Acoustics/Synthetic)	Key Words in the Lyrics
A1	C minor	Blues, R&B, rapping	Cmin9, Fmin9, Db6/9, Gaug7#9 (Jazz Chords)	Acoustic guitar, Drum kit, Bass	Niangzi (form of address for one’s wife), Jianghu, Chinese ancient inn, Sai-bei, Jiangnan
A2	G minor	Nu metal, rapping	F5, G5, Bb5 (Power Chords)	Electric guitar, Drum kit, Bass, Piano, Chinese instrument (Erhu, Luo)	Hakka Chinese, Chinese martial arts, Kungfu, Chinese cold weapon
A3	C-Db minor	Nu metal, rapping	C5, F5, Bb5 (Power Chords)	Electric guitar, Drum kit, Bass, Record turntable, Synthesizer, Chinese instrument (Chinese drum, Bianzhong, Pipa, Dizi)	The Great Wall, Mongolian Plateau, Chinese characters, Yellow River, Mount Tai, Yangtze River, Dragon, Orient, Ethnic identity
A4	D-Eb major	R&B, rapping	D, Gadd 9, Asus4, A7, Bm7	Acoustic guitar, Piano, Drum kit, Bass, Strings	Chinese tea culture, The Classic of Tea by Lu Yu, Family love (grandpa and grandson), Shan shui painting, Tang Dynasty
A5	C# minor	Pop rap, electronic	Am, Dm7, E7	Guitar, Drum, Bass, Strings, Record turntable, Chinese instrument (Guzheng)	Chinese chess
A6	D-D# minor	Pop rap, electronic	Dm, Dm#, Gm#, A#7	Guitar, Drum, Bass, Electric piano, Synthesizer, Record turntable, Chinese instrument (Dizi, Guzheng, Pipa)	Ancient History of China, Three Kingdoms (Cao Wei, Shu Han, Dong Wu), Chinese cold weapons, Chang’an, Yellow Turban Rebellion
A7	Eb-E minor	Pop rap, electronic	Eb5, E5	Synth-bass, Drum, Bass, Synthesizer, Chinese instrument (Dizi, Xiao)	<i>Hua Tuo</i> , Traditional Chinese medicine, Names of Chinese herbs, Chinese calligraphy
A8	D minor	Nu metal, rapping	D5, Bb5, G5, A5 (Power Chords)	Electronic guitar, Drum kit, Bass, Record turntable, Chinese instrument (Guzheng, Chinese drum, Erhu, Pipa, Dizi)	Kungfu, Chinese culture (Wuxia, Jianghu), Secret boxing, Chin Woo Athletic Association
A9	F minor	Nu metal, rapping	F5, Cb5, Eb5 (Power Chords)	Electronic guitar, Drum kit, Bass, Chinese instrument (Guzheng, Xiao)	Ancient imperial court, Royal family fighting

Song Code	Key	Stylistic Feature	Main Chord	Instrument (Acoustics/Synthetic)	Key Words in the Lyrics
A10	Bb major	Pop, R&B	Bb, Cm7, Fadd11, Fm7/Ab, Gm9	Guitar, Drum kit, Bass, Strings, Chinese instrument (Erhu, Guzheng, Pipa, Dizi, Chinese drum, Luo, Temple block)	Modern times to ancient times, Oil-paper umbrella

Table 3. Selection of typical *Zhongguofeng*-style songs written by Jay Chou (2000–2010).

Song Code	Key	Style	Scales Mode	Instrument (Acoustic/Synthetic)	Content of Lyrics
B1	G-Ab major	Ballad	Chinese heptatonic scale (qingyue)	Guitar, Drum kit, Bass, Piano, Chinese instrument (Guzheng, Pipa, Erhu, Konghou)	Through listening and analysis, we suggest that the inspiration for, and content of, the lyrics come from Chinese poetry (Tang poems 唐诗 and Song ci 宋词), involving traditional Chinese art or artworks, and using Chinese rhetoric.
B2	B major	Ballad	Chinese pentatonic scale	Drum kit, Bass, Strings, Piano, Chinese instrument (Guzheng, Yangqin, Pipa, Temple block)	
B3	D-Eb major	Ballad	Chinese hexatonic scale (qingjue)	Drum kit, Bass, Piano, Chinese instrument (Bianzhong, Erhu, Guzheng, Xiao)	
B4	F-G major	Ballad	Chinese pentatonic scale	Guitar, Drum kit, Bass, Strings, Chinese instrument (Guzheng, Pipa, Hulusi)	
B5	A-Bb major	Ballad	Chinese pentatonic scale	Electronic guitar, Drum kit, Bass, Piano, Chinese instrument (Chinese drum, Guzheng, Dizi)	
B6	D major	Ballad	Chinese pentatonic scale	Drum kit, Bass, Strings, Piano, Chinese instrument (Erhu)	
B7	A minor	Ballad	Chinese heptatonic scale (yayue)	Guitar, Drum kit, Bass, Strings, Piano	

The Evolution of Contemporary Mandopop

Mandopop essentially refers to popular Mandarin music originating from Shanghai's *Shidaiqu* in the 1930s. The term was adopted from the creation of Cantopop and is now classified as a subgenre of commercial popular music within Chinese popular music. Since the 1980s, the Chinese popular music scene has been significantly dominated by Mandopop, which is simply categorised in Mainland China as Ballad songs or *Gangtai* pop 港台流行

乐. The ballad (transliterated as *Bayue* 芭乐 in Taiwan) is a type of song characterised by lyrics revolving around love stories, repeated melodies, soft vocals, and narrative. *Gangtai* pop is the term often used by audiences in Mainland China to describe songs from Hong Kong and Taiwan. This style of music was influenced by Japanese *enka* 演歌 and the Taiwanese "campus folksong movement" 校园民歌运动, contributing significantly to the thematic spirit and melodic character of Mandopop. *Gangtai* songs emphasised personal emo-

tions, embodied warmth and beauty, and underwent a cyclical development. However, they were once criticised in Mainland China as being *mi mi zhi yin* 靡靡之音 (literally decadent sound), and the government banned some popular songs of this genre from Mainland China (Gold, 1993). Nevertheless, the Mandopop industry gradually evolved into a commercial entity, accompanied by the emergence of a group of pop songwriters. The prosperity of Mandopop has changed over time and in different regions, particularly within the Sinophone world. Taiwan has been the undisputed leader in this industry, boasting its own set of distinctive characteristics, especially since 2000 (Moskowitz, 2010, p. 107).

The Emergence and Definition of Zhongguofeng Music

Mandopop has never had the same clear genre and style characteristics as Western popular music. Initially, it existed as a direct appropriation of foreign musical styles. It was not until the Taiwanese singer-songwriter Lo Ta-yu 罗大佑, through his released albums, and later the Taiwanese producer Jonathan Lee 李宗盛, who produced albums for many pop singers, that Mandopop entered an era of music creation. The development of the Internet in the 1990s also broadened the range of popular music consumption for younger audiences. During the early 2000s, a type of Mandopop that combines the elements of Chinese culture and Western popular music styles began gaining traction in China, a trend that helped Mandopop go international. In many ways, this trend can be attributed to the emergence of “Niangzi” 娘子, a song included on Chou’s self-titled debut album, which was released in 2000. The song incorporates jazz chords and R&B style, combined with hip-pop and lyrics that mimic the classic Chinese, which in turn influenced the subsequent creation of Mandopop songwriters and *Zhongguofeng*-style musical works. This style of popular music was undefinable or unclear when the song “Niangzi” was re-

leased. The crossover was also influenced by the musical style and basic structure of previous Mandarin ballads, and reviews were polarised. Some audiences and music practitioners did not accept this category of popular music, arguing that the mainstream style of the Mandopop music market was undermined by its personality. For example, Chinese rock singer Zheng Jun 郑钧 said, “Chou’s music has no any connotation and lacks thinking, which is hard to penetrate me.” Conversely, other advocates saw this as the new era of Mandopop, suggesting that it could overtake the long-standing dominance of the Chinese popular music market by ballads, and expecting a transformation of the Mandopop industry with the emergence of Chou. Chinese music producer Gao Xiaosong 高晓松 commented on Chou’s music on a TV show, stating, “He didn’t directly imitate Western R&B and hip-hop, but incorporated his own style.”

Terms similar to *Zhongguofeng* about the translation include the literal translation “China wind” (Chow, 2013), *Gufeng* (Wang, 2020), and *Chinoiserie* in French. The concept of *Gufeng* is similar to that of *Zhongguofeng*, but there are some differences (Sun, 2017, p. 5). It often incorporates stories about Chinese legends, such as *Xianxia* 仙侠 as a genre of literature based on Chinese mythology. Conventionally, it belongs to the scope of the “two-dimensional space sub-culture,” with early inspiration coming from online games and novels, and more recently existing in anime and television dramas (Sun, 2020, pp. 87–88). The term *Chinoiserie* appeared in Europe in the 17th century, initially to imitate and explain Chinese and Eastern Asian art and culture (Sloboda, 2018, p. 143). It often refers to the design style influenced by Chinese elements and is also utilised in other fields, such as architecture, literature, and music. The term *Zhongguofeng* in contemporary Mandopop refers to the Chinese style and imagery based on Chinese traditional culture (Chen, 2009). According to Chen (2009), the terms “3 Ancient” 三古 and “3 New” 三新 can be used

to define *Zhongguofeng*-style music. Figure 3 explains these terms.

Based on Figure 2, “3 Ancient” refers to ancient *ci*词 and *fu*赋, ancient culture, and ancient melody. This primarily refers to whether the lyrics exhibit the rhetorical style of classical Chinese and ancient poetry and whether the content reflects ancient Chinese culture. On the other hand, “3 New” refers to new, popular styles of singing, new arrangements, and new concepts. It involves incorporating traditional Chinese musical instruments into popular music arrangements and giving new meaning to traditional culture. For example, songs from the album *Heroes of Earth* 盖世英雄 by the American-Chinese pop artist Leehom Wang王力宏, released in 2005, including “Beside the Plum Blossoms” 在梅边 and “Mistake in the Flower Fields” 花田错, are typical embodiments of *Zhongguofeng*-style music. The creative inspiration for these two pop songs was drawn from the scripts and tunes of the Beijing Opera while integrating Western popular music arrangements. With respect to the vocals, “Beside the Plum Blossoms” employs a “chinked-out” vocal style and “Mistake in the Flower Fields” utilises an R&B groove.

Musical Analysis of Zhongguofeng Cha-

racteristics

Moskowitz (2010, p. 3) emphasised that Mandopop introduced a new form of popular music to the audience in the Sino-phone world, integrating traditional Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, and Western musical styles. Western popular music styles and genres, such as jazz and R&B, are marginal for Mandopop, though they are occasionally served as a source from which to draw supplements. Once, it was common to appropriate melodies and directly cover foreign pop songs while incorporating new lyrics in Chinese. However, in the late 1990s some pop songwriters introduced groundbreaking musical works that complemented mainstream Mandopop. First, this transformation involved an obvious crossover in musical style rather than just a music commercialisation model. Second, it can be interpreted as a revival of the gradual popularity of *Zhongguofeng*-style music in the 2010s. *Zhongguofeng* can be regarded as a popular Chinese music genre that adopts traditional approaches in its lyrics, melody, and instruments compared to general popular music. It is essentially contemporary popular music with more Chinese elements in its arrangement and references, especially in terms of lyrics that employ rhetorical devices, such as si-



Figure 2. Definition of the characteristics of *Zhongguofeng*.

miles and metaphors. While it existed in Mandopop before the 2000s (e.g., “Yi Jian Mei” 一剪梅, “Hai Shang Hua” 海上花, and popular theme songs from television and films in Hong Kong and Taiwan in 1970–1990), there was no standardised narrative of *Zhongguofeng*. The lyrics of early Mandopop songs used many meteorological, floral, and abstract terms, such as “sky, wind, rain, cloud, sea, flower, and dream,” to express metaphors for love (Yang, 1994, p. 63). However, the post-2000s eventually saw a breakthrough in the Mandopop scene, reflecting the musical stylistic characteristics of hybrid thinking. Before the commercial success of *Zhongguofeng*-style music, it lacked a standardised format.

In this study, we analysed the creative characteristics of Chou’s *Zhongguofeng*-style songs from three aspects: lyrics, melody, and Chinese culture. Figure 3 presents the results of this analysis.

Analysing the lyrics of typical *Zhongguofeng*-style pop songs reveals that many of them have diverse origins. The analysis emphasises that words precede language and that differences based on words can account for the openness, liminality, multiplicity, and polysemy of culture and literature, thus denying the linguistic centrism of construction (Cai, 2011, p. 186). In this

sense, deconstructing classical texts from traditional Chinese lyricism and then combining them with the lyricist’s expressions of sentiment to create new rhythmic lyrics with a fresh and light tone is a common technique in the creation of *Zhongguofeng*-style lyrics. In addition to deconstructing classical poetic texts, *Zhongguofeng* lyricists habitually break up the structure of classical texts for reconstruction to create unconventional lyrical combinations. For example, the lyrics to the song “The Hair Like Snow” 发如雪 were written by Vincent Fang 方文山, and the song title was inspired by one sentence from the Tang dynasty poet Li Bai’s 李白 poem “Qiang Jin Jiu” 将进酒 (literally “invitation to the wine”). This line describes the color of hair as the same as that of snow, aiming to describe a kind of ideorealm. The first phrase of the lyrics, “The moon like a wolf’s fang,” refers to the moonlight but not its shape. It portrays a pale landscape. The last sentence of the verse, “Only loving the butterfly you incarnated into,” was derived from the Chinese folk tale “Butterfly Lovers” 梁山伯与祝英台, a Chinese story related to poignant, everlasting love. Here, the lyricist aimed to reflect that popular music is mostly related to love and sought to expand the influence of popular culture.

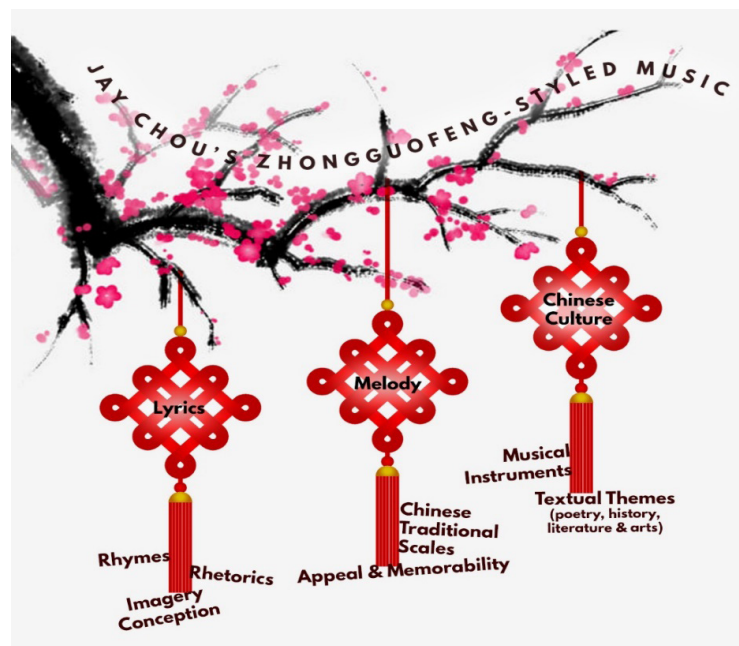


Figure 3. Creative characteristics of Jay Chou’s *Zhongguofeng*-style music.

Regarding the ontology of the music, *Zhongguofeng*-style songs exhibit unique artistic characteristics in terms of scales, modes, and timbre, which distinguish them from other genres of popular music. These features are based on the deconstruction of the traditional Chinese music system, followed by restructuring the music using contemporary popular music styles and elements. In terms of modes and scales, the scales in Chinese music are classified by the number of steps, such as the pentatonic scale (5-tone), the hexatonic scale (6-tone), and the heptatonic scale (7-tone). From the perspective of modes, the five basic steps (*gong* 宫, *shang* 商, *jue* 角, *zhi* 徵, and *yu* 羽) are used as the tonic to form the five traditional modes. On this basis, any of the added tones (*qingjue* 清角, *bianzhi* 变徵, *biangong* 变宫, and *run* 闰) can be incorporated to form the 6-tone scale. By adding two tones to the pentatonic, a 7-tone is formed. However, the combination of the two added tones can only be the *Qingyue* 清乐 scale with *qingjue* and *biangong*, the *Yayue* 雅乐 scale with *bianzhi* and *biangong*, and the *Yanyue* 燕乐 scale with *qingjue* and *run*. Chinese musicology is very complex in terms of tonal scales. It is on these traditional tonal scales that *Zhongguofeng*-style pop songs are composed melodically in the pentatonic mode. It could be argued that the songs in Table 3 were composed on the basis of the scale mode of Chinese musicology. For example, the song "Lan Ting Xu" 兰亭序 is composed in a pure pentatonic scale, with the tones of G and C# of the D major key absent in the melodic progression.

In terms of arrangement and orchestration, *Zhongguofeng*-style musical works blend the sounds of many traditional Chinese musical instruments as an important means of expressing emotions and highlighting style. In other words, this approach involves deconstructing the Chinese music timbre system and then combining it with contemporary electronic and electro-acoustic instrument timbres to reconstruct the arrangement system for *Zhongguofeng*-style musical works. During the develop-

ment of Chinese traditional music, different styles utilised particular instruments. For example, the *guzheng* 古筝, *pipa* 琵琶, and *erhu* 二胡 are the most commonly employed instruments in *Zhongguofeng*-style musical works by Chou. Combined with the electronic and electro-acoustic instruments of popular music, he reconstructed the stylistic characteristics to illuminate the acoustic appearance of *Zhongguofeng*. However, the use of these traditional instrument tones is not entirely authentic by the soloists; some musical works employ sampled tones from the instruments. For instance, the timbres of *guzheng* and *pipa* appear in the songs "Huan Yuan Chia" 霍元甲 and "Fist of the Dragon" 龙拳. The timbres are produced by first deconstructing the monophonic playing of the traditional instrument, followed by deconstructing the playing intensity of the instrument. The various playing techniques are dismantled, sampled on that basis, then reconstructed and synthesised using a sampler.

We began by considering the song "Niangzi" as representative of a crossover from the Western musical system to *Zhongguofeng*, foreshadowing what would later become a mature *Zhongguofeng*-style song. According to the parameters presented in Table 2, the chords, arrangement, and style of "Niangzi" reflect the typical features of Western popular music, including different stylistic elements. Although the lyrics include the classical elements of Chinese culture in the form of mimicking ancient poetry, it was difficult to determine whether the song belongs to "the East" or "the West" in terms of its reception by the audience. The song "Dong Feng Po" 东风破 has become representative of the *Zhongguofeng* style in the Mandopop scene. It could be argued that Chou's music is not an example of direct musical and cultural appropriation, but rather a hybrid of the two. The question arises, however, as to why such a composition with elements of Chinese culture was not widely noticed 20 years ago and was not regarded as *Zhongguofeng*. As discussed earlier, the "format"

of *Zhongguofeng*-style musical works was discussed, focusing on the characteristics that make them so effective for contemporary mainstream Mandopop.

Cultural hybridity can be interpreted as the integration of local and foreign cultures across borders, and is often closely linked to the concept of globalisation. In the context of globalisation, our understanding of music is no longer confined to temporal, spatial, and geographical changes. The presence of the Internet and media have blurred the “border,” with words, such as “mixture,” “blend,” and “fusion,” having almost equal meanings to denote the combination of different music genres. Gradually, diversity has arisen from outside of the boundary in this flow of musical culture, creating a new form of expression. Recorded music and artists can now achieve success and appeal to a wider audience by blending music within the mainstream market. Therefore, diversity can break through the inherent music genre and form a changeable music style. Chou’s musical works exemplify this blending of multiple popular music styles, including R&B, rap, classical elements, ballad, and other genres. The analysis of the selected music samples revealed that the musical themes are diversified and rich. It also reflects the characteristics of diverse music. From the perspective of style, Chou’s musical works

embody the integration and diversification of different popular music styles and *Zhongguofeng* characteristics. The arrangement of instruments and harmonies reflects the fusion of electro-acoustic instruments and chords commonly used in Western popular music with Chinese national instruments. Since the release of Chou’s musical works, it has become common to mix multiple musical genres in one album or one song in contemporary Mandopop. This notion is increasingly evident in contemporary Chinese popular music, which has a hybrid form with *Zhongguofeng* characteristics. For example, the song “Mangzhong” 芒种, composed by the Chinese original music group Interestingcn 音阙诗听, released in 2019, embodies the fusion of multiple elements. The creators incorporated Chinese instruments based on popular music, particularly in the interlude, demonstrating a duet between the violin and *guzheng*. The lyrics were inspired by one of the 24 Chinese solar terms with an accompanying story. Being unmistakably Chinese-sounding in character, the melody is appealing and memorable for the audience, probably generating an “earworm” effect.

Figure 4 depicts the results of the analysis of characteristics of Chou’s musical works from four perspectives.

Chou and his creative team struck a critical balance by combining the compel-

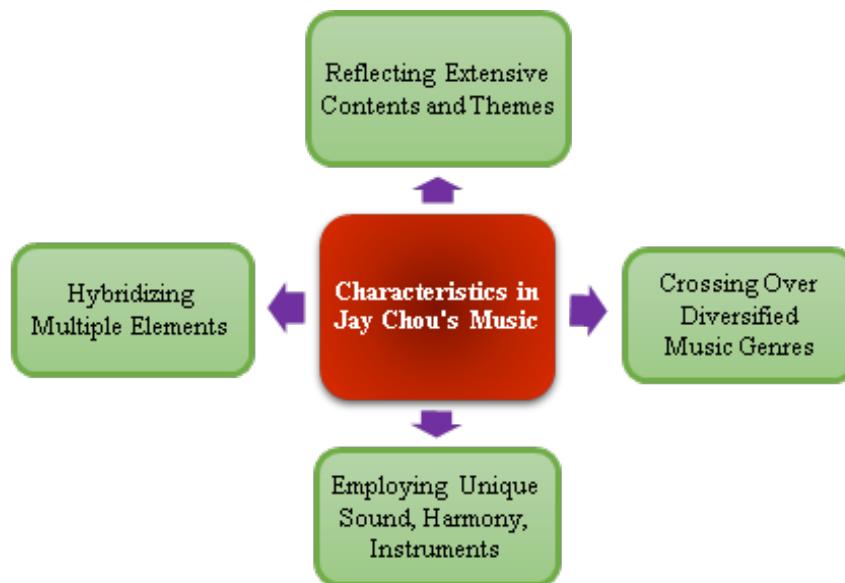


Figure 4. Summarising the findings about the characteristics of Chou’s music.

ling styles and genres of Western popular music with mainstream creative forms and elements of Chinese culture. First, the popularity of Chou and his works is based on the innovative fusion of music genres. He mixed R&B, rap, rock, nu metal, ballad, and other genres and pioneered the integration of traditional Chinese elements into his music. The unique form of *Zhongguofeng*-style music is embodied in the lyrics (usually involving Chinese culture), Chinese pentatonic scales, and traditional Chinese instruments combined with Western popular music genres. Notably, the release of the song "Dong Feng Po" represents the establishment of Chou's interpretation of *Zhongguofeng*-style music. In his subsequent studio albums, one can observe how his compositions reflect the integration of different genres and even exemplify the crossover of classical and popular music. Second, Chou led the way for hybrid compositions but also influenced many songwriters, such as Leehom Wang, Xu Song 许嵩, Zhou Yan 周延, and others in the industry, to follow this type of composition. This sparked healthy competition among artists and expanded the scale of the Mandopop market, while also increasing the genre's influence across Asia. Third, unlike a pure ballad singer, Chou does not compose and express romantic and melancholy emotions through his vocal performance; instead, he embodies the image of "cool Chineseness" in his works and represents the thoughts and emotions of millennial audiences.

Chou's hybrid thinking in popular music compositions containing *Zhongguofeng* characteristics has been accepted in the mainstream Mandopop market, breaking the boundaries between popular music genres. *Zhongguofeng* can easily be blended with other genres, providing a more diverse and richer body of work for the mainstream Mandopop market and audience. Hybrid thinking is mainly reflected in the Western popular music style and Chinese music culture in the creation of musical works. Moreover, the popularity of Chou and his works is based on an innovative mixture of musical genres. This further confirms the hybrid tendency in

Chou's music.

In terms of the reliability of the results, we used the same criteria, measures, and protocols when analysing different songs or aspects of music. In popular music analysis, external validity considers the extent to which the findings can be generalised to broader contexts that encompass other songs, artists, or musical genres. In this study, we selected Chou's representative *Zhongguofeng*-style songs, which clearly convey the characteristics of the songs or artist studied, making it easier to consider whether the findings apply to different cases. Additionally, content validity is particularly relevant when examining lyrics or thematic content. For this reason, a detailed analysis, encompassing song lyrics and the contents of musical level, was conducted in this study to capture the full range of relevant *Zhongguofeng*-style themes or elements within the music.

CONCLUSION

Following the penetration of multiple Western popular music genres into the Chinese market, the origin of *Zhongguofeng*, which literally means "Chinese style," is rather difficult to trace. Nevertheless, in terms of the history of Chinese popular music, from *Shidaiqu* to *Gangtai* pop, or from *Xibeifeng* 西北风 to Chinese hip-hop in Mainland China, *Zhongguofeng* music is gradually being accepted and recognised as a genre that is inseparable from narratives about having a "taste" of China. Chou's musical works combine the style of Western popular music with Chinese music culture, reversely translating Mandopop with *Zhongguofeng* as a "Chinese image" to the global audience. The popularity of his works in the Sinophone world has evoked a sense of "imaginary community" for the audience scattered across temporal and spatial dimensions, enabling music and Chineseness to cross the borders of language, culture, ethnicity, and nationality. Chou's works prove that "foreign" forms of popular culture, such as R&B and rap, are not unacceptable in China. His *Zhongguofeng*-style songs embrace Western popular music while reflecting

Chinese cultural identity, and ultimately improved the global reception of Mandopop. This article deconstructed Chou’s popular musical works from 2000 to 2010 through a micro-analysis to understand the form of his musical works and the characteristics of contemporary Mandopop. We conducted an in-depth analysis of the expression techniques of *Zhongguofeng*-style musical works, the musical form of the works, and the hybrid characteristics of his compositions. In terms of musical characteristics, *Zhongguofeng* is defined by its lyrics, melody, instruments, and Chinese cultural references. Simultaneously, the works contain diverse musical styles and characteristics that combine popular and traditional elements. A limitation of this research lies in the restricted sample range and narrow research scope. It does not extensively cover all of Chou’s works or other notable contemporaries in the Mandopop scene. This could be addressed in future studies.

China has not conventionally been a popular music powerhouse in Asia, but it boasts a huge market. This article explores the concerns of Mandopop artists striving for diversity in popular music despite the cultural particularities of Mandopop. In this process, exemplified by *Zhongguofeng*-style music, there has been a fusion of musical genres as local popular music agents and songwriters interact and negotiate with global musical forms, using them as resources to construct their own Mandopop markets. From this viewpoint, it becomes clear that within the context of globalisation, especially in the field of popular music, creative hybrid thinking has emerged in the Mandopop scene, with a focus on maintaining local identity on a global scale. Notably, calls against cultural imperialism are mostly aimed at preserving “diversity” and the “coexistence” of different forms of culture. Thus, contemporary Mandopop, as characterised by Chou, transcends the boundaries of musical genres and skillfully hybridises Eastern traditional cultures and Western popular music forms. However, whether this strategy can be used for the future development of Mandopop remains unexplored. Since we

did not consider the visuals of Chou’s music videos, which usually feature extravagant representations of *Zhongguofeng*, this paper did not take into account Chou’s status as visionary extraordinaire. This could be considered in future research to shed further light on the nature of crossover and hybridity in Mandopop.

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