

# Grotesque and Gaudy World of Music, Indispensable Narrative Pen

## Study on The Narrative Strategy of Modern Chinese Pop Songs' Lyrics

Chunjing Zhang

College of Applied Technology

Southwest University

Chongqing, China

Chunjing520530@126.com

**Abstract**—Since the 1990s, the creation of pop songs' lyrics has undergone a lot of changes, transforming from the past emphasis on inner expression to frequent use of narration. Thus, the grotesque and gaudy world of music, concentrating on creators' narrative pen, unfolds vividly. Some important narrative strategy has gradually taken shape, including basic narrative strategy of "I tell you" and public participation in "telling a story", Demonstration of details and fragments in life of whole narration and defamiliarization on narration.

**Keywords**-lyrics; pop songs; narration

### I. INTRODUCTION

No matter what kinds of art form, story-telling is the most attractive method. Out of curiosity, everyone likes listening to the story. Broadly speaking, many modern pop songs tell the story to listeners when sung by someone. Singing a good song always reminds people of some times, some stories and some people simultaneously. The pop song is just like a notebook, in which the past people and stories are recorded, making people lost in it, thoughts flying and moods comfortable. This shows that a good narrative song often help people emphasize themselves, arouses public resonance and has a strong social participation. Just like poetry, novels and essays, the lyric of a song is an art form, which expressing poetic imagery and atmosphere, forming an aesthetic world mutually with music. However, lyrics have unique narrative way, aesthetic perspective and independent aesthetic value, which are different from novels, movies, TV storytelling. These are reflection of people's living state, mental outlook and cultural mentality in certain time.

### II. BASIC NARRATIVE STRATEGY OF "I TELL YOU" AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN "STORY TELLING"

The basic structure of the lyrics is calling and answering. And dominant factor of Lyrics meanings is emotional echoes between sender and recipient. American literary critic Jacobsen points that each symbol comprises six factors when discussing symbol's six dominant factors. With different dominate factors, the symbol presents different features. If the sender is on the leading position, the symbol presents "emotionality", that focus on the expression of subjective emotion; If the recipient is on the leading position, the

symbol presents "conation", which promotes recipient to take action. According to Jacobsen's brilliant analysis, lyrics appear to be more emotional or strongly conative. Therefore, the lyrics have a strong tendency of appealing. Answering is the basic trend of the lyrics, narrative strategy of "I tell you" is the most fundamental sending mode of lyrics. The appearance of subject expressing is an important characteristics of the lyrics.

There are too many examples that we cannot cite them all. According to the study of the highest search volume of 100 new songs lyrics on Baidu MP3 search, the author find that 95% of the lyrics comprise the basic strategy of "I tell you", including "I", "you" or slightly distorted "I" and "you", even if starting in the fashion of third person and through the whole song, the appealing of "I" to "you" still appear at last.

For example, in early 2012, the theme song "Whom my tears fly for" in TV drama of Strange Hero Ouyang De", sung by Xiao Shenyang, once ranked the first place in Baidu Top100 songs' chart. The lyrics beginning with "why my tears flowing so sadly / all expectations turned ashes in your eyes / meeting under the moonlight / drunk deeply / sand flying in your eyes / breeze kissing your cutesy / infatuated with chance of owning you in my dream / dream of last night / together with you / hurt in my life ever / my lonely sadness". [1]The song is interpreting deep romance sentimentally, followed by the basic pattern of "I tell you".

For another instance, "Jade Lady" singer Yang Yuying, who came back to the public view, once sang a song "I'm waiting for you in spring". The lyrics begin in recalling the past with metaphor, taking "violet fragrance" for "time flowing", taking "shook dream by wind" for "lachrymal face turned aside". The faint sadness that brought by time flowing could be tasted in the narration without "I", "you", but in second part the lyrics still kept the narrative strategy of "I tell you", "My heart is drifting into the cloud of spring / I'm waiting for you in spring / miss turning into rain along with wind / waiting until the moment of next blooming." [2]Until the last, the lyrics did not get rid of the narrative mode of "I tell you".

In addition, there are "extreme" and exclusive sentences like "Only you and I" exist in lyrics of popular songs too. For example, "you love me or him" sung by David Tao, the classic song "only you without him exist in my eyes" re-interpreted by Yuchun Li in Super Girl competition, "only

you in my eyes" sung by Gangshan Jing etc, all these songs want to expel "the third person" out of songs.

When Lyrics narration follows the basic strategy of "I tell you", there is still the ultimate goal of the songs needed to be noticed especially. It does not only just stay in the appreciation level but also enable more listeners to feel it like their own song and emotionally influenced. Therefore, starting from this purpose, "I" and "you" in lyrics does not refer to a specific person, generally they should be a kind of "represent", which stands for public universal emotion when involving in affection of You and I. On this level, a lot of well-known lyrics of popular songs are strongly public participative. Those pop songs are famous for its lyrics, which often provide with sufficient participation room for everyone and an opportunity for each individual's self-presentation. People could understand and feel the lyrics according to their own experiences, just like nationally popular song "my class-table mate", lyrics by Xiaosong Gao, sung by Lao Lang. Many people have experienced many details and affections of campus life in lyrics, the song enable a lot of people to recall their innocent childhood romance and puppy-lover in deep memory. For another example, a popular song "The girl next door look over here" lyrics by Ah-Niu sung by Richie, became favorite across the whole country in 1998, "the girl next door / look over here / look over here / the performances here are wonderful / Do not pretend to be uninterested / the girl next door / look over here / look over here // Do not be scared by my appearance / I'm cute actually / sadness of lonely boy / after speaking out / who understand / please give me a wink / comfort me and make me happy (voiceover: Heyhey, Nobody cares me)." [3]The lyrics are simple that a guy wants to attract attention of the girl next door, but he is mindless. The singing is in a fast-paced mock tone, along with sprightly easy, natural, happy rhythm. Perception of Lyrics scene is also very strong, which makes a lot of guys sing this song unconsciously when beautiful girls passing by. This song not only attracts the girls' attention, but it is also a kind of self-mock to themselves. While there are many girls convert the lyrics into "look over here the boy next door" and hum in similar occasions with a little serious, naughty, rogue feeling of Lyrics revealing perfectly. It also fit the mentality of urban young people's innocent joke. The melody of the song is smoothing, easy remembering and singing. people interpret it by their own understandings, everyone could participate in singing.

In short, all listeners and singers are involved in the process of popular song interpretation; everyone is feeling the trace of their own past existence, tasting the fun of life.

### III. DEMONSTRATION ON DETAILS AND FRAGMENTS OF LIFE IN WHOLE NARRATION

It is easy to find that narration and emotion expression are the main methods to express feelings in study of modern Chinese pop music. With narration on certain event or activity and pouring out of affection in inner world, Lyrics show consideration and value judgment toward time, living environment as well as individual affection. In which the narration is the process of fictional verbal description or

presentation on social life events. Emotion expressing is showing inner affection and expressing subjective feelings. Traditional practices of popular songs are emotion expressing in the past. But since the 1990s, this traditional practices have transformed, narrative lyrics ingredients have been gradually increasing so that narration beyond emotion express in lyrics at last, even the narration is throughout the whole song some time. In the comprehensive view of modern Chinese music, those classic pop songs have become the narrative pop songs. Such as "Understanding" (lyrics by: Rusheng Mo; singer: Xiaoqi Xin), "Taste" (lyrics: Qian Yao; singer: Xiaoqi Xin), "Do not be afraid my sadness" (lyrics: Jonathan Lee; singer: Jeff Chang), "Oceans of love to you" (words: Jonathan Lee; sing: Jeff Chang), "A game in a dream" (lyrics: Wenqing Wang; singer: Jie Wang), "My happiness and worry for you" (lyrics: Jonathan Lee; singer: Emil Wakin Chau), "Potion of Forgetting Love" (words: Anxiu Lee; Lee singer: Andy Lau), "It's a long story" (lyrics: Shiyi Lang; singer: philChang), "the price of love" (lyrics: Jonathan Lee; singer: Sylvia Chang), and so on. Another example is the "Xiaofang" (lyrics / singer: Chunbo Li), "probably in Winter" (lyrics/singer: Chyi Chin), "kissing goodbye" (lyrics: Qihong He; singer: Jacky Cheung), "the most romantic thing" (lyrics: Ruolong Yao; singer: Cyndi Chaw), "Forest of birch" (lyrics /singer: PuShu), the "engagement" (lyrics: Yao Ruoy; sing: Zhou Hui) and "afterwards" (lyrics: Shiren Cheng; sing: Rene Liu), "Could I embrace you" (lyrics: insects; singer: Chang Hui-mei), "Deep Dark" (lyrics: Yingru Liao; singer: Stefanie Sun), "first" (lyrics: Tiancheng Zhang; sing: Michael Wong), "Common Jasmine Orange" (lyrics: Vincent Fang; singer: Jay Chou), "quietness" (lyrics / singer: Jay Chou), "love Before the Century" (lyrics: Vincent Fang; singer: Jay Chou), "He really love you" (words: Zhiqing; sing: Adu), "the Moon Represents my heart" (the original lyrics: Sun yee; lyrics: David Tao, Wawa; singer: David Tao). These popular songs' lyrics are complete narration, as Hillis Miller said, "The narration is a kind of rhetoric" [4], which is the key point to the success of a song. Because of several storytelling narrative pop songs which shows many touching pictures and scenes, there is no direct emotion express in the narration. The lyrics still could convey profound and universal feelings. finally inspiration arise from the bottom of the listeners' heart, the song also become widely accepted constantly.

When narrative pop song tells the story, it also emphasizes demonstration on details and fragments of life. In the lyrics, detailed narration shows consideration of people towards life events and activities, it's very episodic and full of stories. In other words, modern lyrics are no longer like the lyric poem, instead they are much more like narrative poem. For example, "Common Jasmine Orange", sung by Jay Chou issued in August 2004, quickly became popular song: "The sparrow outside the window fusses on the wire post / you say this phrase evinces summer's authenticity / the pencil in my hand swivels over paper / I express in few lines what you mean to me / the taste of saury both you and cat share the desire to know / in such a way we reminisce the sweetness of puppy love / the warmth of

sunshine is just like freshly picked strawberries/ you said you dislike to eat up such cherished feeling /all night it drizzles / my love overflows just like the rain /fallen leaves in the yard /their thickness compares to my deeply missing / not even words of disagreement / could play coolant to my passion for you / you are in every chapter of my poetry /plumpy grain clusters have prospered the season / and your rosy cheeks resemble the ripe tomatoes in the field/ you suddenly told me that the name of Common Orange Jasmine is beautiful / at the moment I just want to kiss your the fractious lip / all night it drizzles / my love overflows like the rain / butterfly on the window sill / like beautiful chapter of the poem /then I keep writing / put 'love you forever ' in the end of the poem / you are the only one I want to understand. " [5] The lyrics show many details of life: Sparrow twittering on wire poles, rain overflowing all night; fallen leaves accumulated in the yard; grain clusters in the fields; butterfly dancing. Every detail is symbolized by lyricist, standing for the guy's affection immersed in sweet love thoughts. "Sparrow twittering on wire poles 'reflects guy's sweet feeling in the way of personification, love is as passionate as summer; 'raining all night rainwater overflows, fallen leaves accumulated in the yard 'is used to describe his natural, dense, deep affection. In 'plump grain clusters 'happy ' the whole season", an adjective is used as a verb expressing the wish and joy of harvest in love vividly. "Butterfly dancing outside the window" describes a kind of gentle and romantic screen. Lyrics may be short, but it contains many scenes, details by details, fragments of life by fragments of life, which express a complete emotional experience. The lyrics are full of scenes and many objectives, which make many beautiful and happy scenes emerge in mind just like once experienced by people.

Many similar narrative songs are post-modern style, breaking the limitations of the original lyrics style. They are strongly narrative, rich and delicate in description of the details and fragments of life, such as "steel box of peninsula" (lyrics / singer: Jay Chou), "Simple love" (lyrics Ruoxuan Xu/ singer: Jay Chou), "Dusk" (words: Chen Xinrong; singer: Steve Chou), "He really love you" (lyrics: Zhiqing Lee; singer: Adu), "Encounter" (lyrics: Jiayang Yi; singer: Stefanie Sun), " 10:30 at airport " (lyrics / singer: David Tao), "wings" (lyrics: Sier Zhang; singer: JJ). The lyrics of these songs are telling the story apparently. Moreover, it's telling a life condition and expressing people's thinking way toward life, showing the living situation of modern people finally.

#### IV. DEFAMILIARIZATION IN LYRICS ON NARRATION

There is so-called defamiliarization in lyrics on narration. Just like Victor Shklovsky, the representative of Russian pharisaism, wrote in his famous essay "Art as Technique" : "the object in the name of art being here is for recalling people's feelings to life, making people feel object, making stone to be stone. The purpose of art is to make you feel object as what you see in the video, instead of what you know before: method of art is method of defamiliarization dealing on objects, it's complex form of practices, which increases the difficulty and delaying of feeling. Since the process of artistic appreciation is for oneself, it should be

extended; Art is an experiencing way of the object creations, and the creation in art is no longer important. "[6] Victor Shklovsky believes that, when frequent repeating action becomes a habit, the action will become automatic and mechanical. Automation makes people pay no attention to outside objects, and make them lose feeling's richness, vitality and poetry. Consequently, "life is lost, and finally becomes nothing". In order to break automatic perception, defamiliarization is needed, a new form should be created, which makes people's perception free from "automaticity" and return to the original experience, recalling an acute sense of the world. Because of being familiar to objects, people's sense turns to be numb, people just deal with them mechanically. Therefore, it's necessary to eliminate mechanical perception and retrieve poetic feeling of life in arts.

Based on such theory, it's also necessary to break up automation and get rid of the mechanical perception in pop music, which constantly evokes people's interest in songs to make them listen to songs with a surprising vision and poetic feeling. As a result, the original common ordinary objects become extraordinary in people's sense of hearing and vision. In order to achieve this purpose, the lyricist always try every means to convert and reorganize semantics to create fresh feeling, create unfamiliar artistic effect. To be specific, the narrative strategy mainly stands for the following aspects:

##### A. *Comprehensive Application of Varieties of Rhetorical Methods*

"The methods of art are the 'dissimilation' of objects, it is to make the form much more difficult, increasing the difficulty and time of appreciation. Because the process of artistic appreciation is the purpose of art, and this process should be extended, "[7] In order to achieve this goal, artists must deform and recompose art, not only breaking the criterion and strategy of original form, but also developing a new art style that different from predecessors. The direct reflection of lyrics creation is the comprehensive application of a variety of rhetorical methods, which put unrelated people, incidents, scenes and screen together subtly, resulting in a unique flavor and fantastic atmosphere. Thus, listeners gain the feeling of novelty constantly in the process of listening. Such as Jay Chou's "Blue- White Porcelain": " The heaven is expecting the mist and rain/and I am longing for you/ Moonlight is dip up/ making ripples radiating out and the story come to an end /Just like the beautiful porcelain handed down from one generation to another, there lie your smiling eyes all through with me". [8]In this song, the author comprehensively use inversion, simile, exaggeration, grotesque, irony, symbolism, metaphors and other rhetorical methods, making lyrics energetic and stretching like poetry, which increases the difficulty and time of perception and creates a fresh feel.

##### B. *Integration of The Lyrics and Classical Poetry*

Due to differences between ancient and modern languages, music, and ways of emotional expression, many lyricists take original words of classical poetry as raw materials to recreate, cite the whole original sentences, or

interpret the meaning, or use poetic imagery, and integrate the re-creation of lyrics subtly, resulting in effect of defamiliarization. For example, famous Taiwan writer Qiong Yao is very familiar with classical Chinese poetry, in her adapted fictional TV dramas "Princess Huanzhu", the theme song "When" is an recreation of ancient verse poem "the pledge": "When the mountain is no longer exist/ When the river stop flowing / when time stops/ when everything in the world disappear / I still can not break up with you / can not break up with you / your gentleness is the most valuable comfort in my life." [9]

### C. Integration of Lyrics and Beijing Opera

This kind of creation is mainly the integration of most popular R & B genre and classical Beijing opera. Due to the difference between two forms of music, strong conflict of integration brings a fresh feeling. For example, David Tao's "Susan" originates from Peking Opera "Susan Qijie"; In Lee Hom Wang's "one night stand", the lyrics is classical, including using a large number of Chinese traditional opera singing; Shin's "One night in Beijing" also joined a large segment of girl's opera singing in the pressing tone "babbling", many young people follow to sing, enjoying this alternative style of singing. Adding elements of the traditional opera in pop music, often received a lot of unexpected results, just as famous musician Xiaojing Wang said "packaging and singing traditional opera in vogue R & B style and other ways enable fans to re-recognize the charm of the ancient Chinese culture, and seek the ethnic end-result in deep soul."

### D. Integration of Lyrics and other art forms

In addition to integration of classical poetry, Beijing opera, lyrics integrated with other art forms, such as folk songs, Huangmei opera, which could achieve artistic effect of "defamiliarization". For example, Super Girl Bibi Chou's "Liuyang River 2008", based on the genre of R & B-style, integrated with traditional Chinese Hunan folk song "Liuyang River 2008", the melody is elegant, the sense of screen is strong too. Meanwhile, this song is the re-excavation of Chinese culture, songs and folk songs, which present distinctive feelings to listeners. Another example is the interpretation of the "Goddess Marriage" sung by ZiLei, the fresh and smooth style of this song injected a hint of truth affection to current mercenary, blundering music market.

## V. CONCLUSION

Pop song is a kind of pop music which belongs to the category of popular culture. It reflects the life of people living in same times. It's a wide range of expression of

emotional experience and living conditions. It presents tolerant and pluralistic characteristics in the content and form of modern Chinese pop music lyrics; regarding the creation of lyrics, extensive use of "I tell you" narrative strategy, emphasize on listener's public participation nature, show the public details and fragments of life in whole narration, and use the integration with a variety of art forms, bringing a "defamiliarization" artistic effect. However, the narrative strategy of popular song's lyrics is far more than these. With the development of times, changes of the environment and changes in the conception of public aesthetic, narrative lyrics shows a lot of new characteristics, such as cosmic synchronization in the lyrics, which put the modern story into ancient times or future, reconstruct and recover the past scene and screen with modern affection; another example, inspired by post-modern culture hypertext, Hypertext narrative also appeared in lyrics creation. Non-focus narration, non-linear narration, non-time narration, and non-causal narration are all the hypertext narrative strategies in lyric creation. At this point, because of love in pop music, the author attempts to sort out the narrative strategy in lyrics and make some contribution to lyrics study, although the analysis above is just a elementary research which is still in the initial stage of lyrics study.

Every song is a story. People write the life, describe the era, and sing the new life by lyrics. This is the typical way to release the pressure of reality and the typical way to pursue a happy life.

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