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Scripps College

Jay Chou's Kuso Music: Cultural Fusion in the Age of the Internet

Submitted to
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and
Professor Bill Alves

By
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Abstract

Jay Chou is one of the most significant singers in Chinese popular music history. One of Chou's greatest achievements is his implementation of the Chinese "Egao" culture in his music, which originated from Japanese Kuso culture. Such an approach not only created his unique style but also allowed him to adopt various musical techniques together seamlessly. By doing so, Chou created a style that references multiple traditional musical conventions without being bound by any of them. This study aims to examine the evolution of the Kuso culture as well as Chou's implementation of it. The development of Kuso is fostered by the popularization of the Internet in China and the popularity of Kuso artists such as Jay Chou. Chou's Kuso techniques can be used as an inspiration to reinterpret traditional art forms and cultures, but people should also be aware of its potential damages. The derivative nature of Kuso can become problematic to traditional arts and cultures, thus requiring Kuso artists to implement and develop Kuso cautiously.

Keywords: Jay Chou, Kuso, Egao, popular music

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Section 1: Kuso Culture and its Development

Introduction -

Jay Chou is one of the most influential Chinese popular music artists in the last 20 years, which had also been the most significant 20 years in Chinese popular music history. Chou's brilliance and popularity had been apparent ever since he appeared to the public eye.¹ Seven months after his debut (2000/11/06), Chou won the “台湾金曲奖” (Taiwan Golden Melody Award, one of the highest honor in Asian music) for “Best Popular Music Album”, and was nominated for 3 other awards, including best composer, producer, and newcomer.² Eleven months after his debut, Chou's album “Fantasy” sold over 1.7 million albums in Asia and 7.8 million worldwide.³ “Fantasy” won five awards out of its ten nominations in the “Taiwan Golden Melody Awards”.⁴ One year after his debut, Sohu (one of the two most popular search engine in China in 2001) crowned Chou as a “Top Ten Celebrity” and the “Second most popular Internet Search” (the first being DeHua Liu, the contemporary king of popular music in China).⁵

The “Second most popular” designation did not last for long, because Chou's popularity surpassed DeHua Liu in one year. At the end of 2002, Jay Chou was officially the most popular artist (not limited to music) in China.⁶ Four months later, in February of 2003, Chou was on the cover of Time magazine as the “King of Asian Pop”, and the magazine predicted that Chou's music would not

¹ Weirdlove, “周杰伦，一个时代的缔造者. Jay Chou, The Godfather of a New Music Era,” February 25, 2019, <https://www.bilibili.com/read/cv2145817/>.

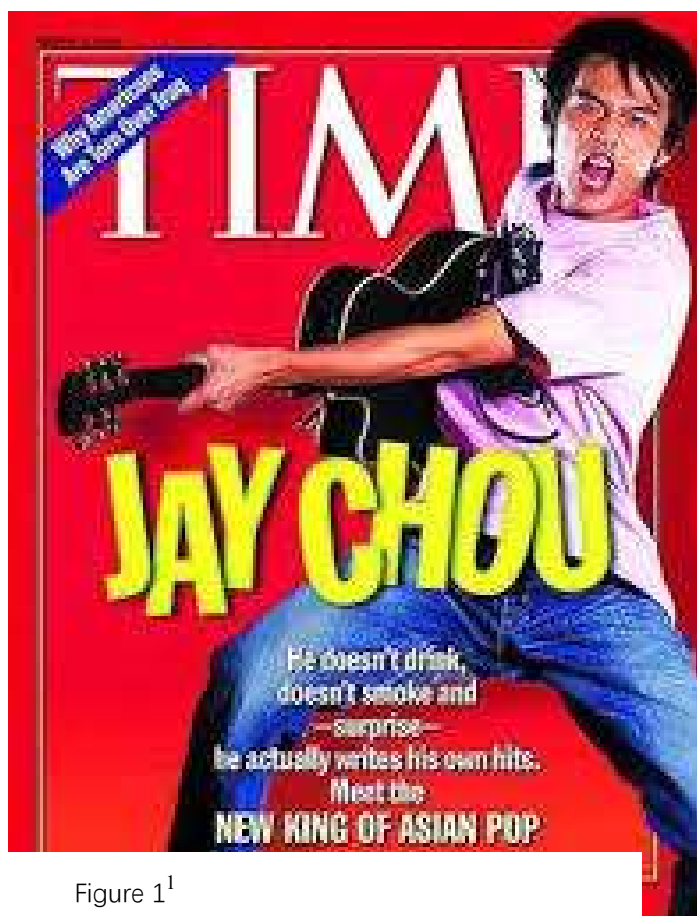
² 12th Taiwan Golden Melody Award Results,” March 7, 2016, <https://www.epochtimes.com/b5/1/3/29/n64429.htm>.

³ “文化部影視及流行音樂產業局-歷屆得獎入圍名單. Bureau of Film, Television and Pop Music Industry of the Ministry of Culture-List of Awarded Finalists,” Bureau of Film, Television and Pop Music Industry, accessed May 7, 2021, https://www.bamid.gov.tw/information_176_64108.html.

⁴ “文化部影視及流行音樂產業局-歷屆得獎入圍名單. Bureau of Film, Television and Pop Music Industry of the Ministry of Culture-List of Awarded Finalists,” Bureau of Film, Television and Pop Music Industry, accessed May 7, 2021, https://www.bamid.gov.tw/information_176_64110.html.

⁵ Sohu Entertainment, “周杰伦从艺经历. Jay Chou's Career Path,” n.d.,

⁶ Sohu Entertainment, “周杰伦从艺经历. Jay Chou's Career Path,” n.d., <http://music.yule.sohu.com/20050801/n226521207.shtml>.

Figure 1¹

only dominate Chinese popular music but also change Asian popular music. Jay Chou was not only the first Chinese but also the first Asian male singer to ever make the cover of Time Magazine.⁷

Time has proven Time magazine's early prediction to be correct. In the next 18 years, Chou became one of the most significant figures in Chinese popular music history. He developed his unique “周氏风格” (Chou's style), which is a combination of Popular music, hip-hop

music, R&B, Blues, Jazz, as well as many different elements in the world of music. Chou became a legend that no contemporary Chinese audience would ever forget.⁸ From 2000 to 2020, along with the development of the Internet, Chinese popular music has not only integrated all kinds of musical genres from various cultures but also has developed its own breed of contemporary Chinese popular music. This process had been greatly advanced by Jay Chou, who dominated the field of Chinese popular music at the time. He not only created unprecedented popularity among Asian artists but also permanently changed contemporary Chinese popular music using Chou's Style.⁹

This paper examines the development of Jay Chou's music compositional style, including the

⁷ Douban. The King of Asian Pop Music in Only Two Years: Jay Chou,” accessed May 4, 2021, <https://www.douban.com/group/topic/142044338/>.

⁸ Gavin Phipps, “Cd Reviews,” August 28, 2004, <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2004/08/29/2003200785>.

⁹ “周杰伦：堪称华语乐坛真正的‘半壁江山’”. Jay Chou: the Emperor of Chinese Popular Music,” December 19, 2020, <https://www.163.com/dy/article/FU9B12NT0537202W.html>.

elements he used, the inspiration he derived from other musical genres, and his integration of different styles into his own. Chou has changed his compositions to appeal to a contemporary Chinese audience, and his effort had also changed the musical taste of the contemporary Chinese audiences. This mutually influential relationship became the key to one of the most significant creations in Chinese popular music history. On the one hand, Chou's Western classical musical background helped him integrate Western musical techniques into Chinese popular music, including but not limited to style, performance techniques, as well as chord usage. On the other hand, this newly integrated style became a new genre, namely the "New Chinese Popular Music Style". This new genre belongs to a new generation of Chinese popular musicians, and Chou was one of the most significant figures who started this revolution.

In this paper, I will argue that Chou's music is deeply influenced by Japanese Kuso culture. Kuso, as an integrating phenomenon, helped Chou to fuse various techniques that are seemingly unrelated together. Because of Kuso, Chou was able to break certain musical rules without losing the significance of musical style, helping him create the "New Chinese Popular Music Style". Moreover, the development of Kuso culture in China, along with the development of the Internet, had greatly contributed to Jay Chou's career development and his composition development to breed "周氏风格" (Chou's style): evoking the familiarity of a culture without completely adapting to its cultural conventions. This created a new path to innovate upon traditional styles and integrate new cultures. At the end of my paper, I will examine some prospects of new Chinese culture, including some inspirations gained from Chou's success.

The origin of Kuso

The word Kuso was originated from Japan, where it literally means “feces”. The first appearance of Kuso as a cultural reference was in a Japanese video game “Death Crimson”. The character “Echizen Kosuke” would yell “くそ (Kuso)” when he is attacked by the enemy. Because the game was poorly executed, with redundant background setting, overly hard difficulty, and bad video quality, gamers commonly referred to this game as “Kuso Game” (meaning garbage game, feces game). This vivid description of the game made the word Kuso popular among the Japanese Internet community. Japanese teenagers not only use the word Kuso for “Death Crimson” but poorly executed games in general. As the word gained popularity, it was applied to many other things.

Kuso soon became a useful and convenient expression for teenagers to not only complain about poorly executed games but also other terrible things in their life. Anything that they attempt to mock would have the word Kuso as a prefix, such as Kuso movie, Kuso TV, and Kuso product. Different from the word “bad”, Kuso describes the non-seriousness of things, showing that something could be so terrible that it becomes interesting to tease. In a way, this is an early attempt of making a meme out of popular culture references, where people enjoy making fun of something so much that the “terrible part” of that thing becomes valuable. The word Kuso started a phenomenon that would change how many people view traditional cultural references: things can be interesting by being terrible. “Kuso Game”, as an example, demonstrates that popularity can have no direct link with quality; anything that possesses interesting elements can become influential regardless of it having a positive or negative impact.¹⁰

¹⁰ “Encyclopedia - Kuso - Chinese Culture. KUSO Is the Term Used in East Asi,” accessed May 4, 2021, <https://amp.blog.shops-net.com/2653158/1/Kuso.html>.

Kuso in China - the 先行者 (Xianxingzhe) Robot

As the concept of Kuso was passed to the Taiwanese Internet community, the meaning of the word was adapted to other cultural products. As the usage of Kuso in Japan, the word is still used to tease entertaining things. However, the usage of the word expanded to things that were not meant for entertainment. One early and significant example of Taiwan's adapted usage of the word Kuso is the mocking of the "Xianxingzhe" robot (The year 2000). The "Xianxingzhe" robot was built by the People's Republic of China as an early milestone for China's robotic industry.¹¹ Though it was originally meant to indicate the technological innovation and progress of mainland China, the robot was an absolute failure. "Xianxingzhe" was not capable of executing many basic functions well, such as walking, completing specified actions, or talking. The robot could only take two steps per second, and that was all it can do. Moreover, the robot had an amusing look that drew it away from the seriousness of the robot's debut (Figure 1, the image of Xianxingzhe, seen below). The most amusing

¹¹ "The Publishing of the Xianxingzhe Robot," accessed May 4, 2021, https://web.archive.org/web/20040203050924/http://www.peopledaily.co.jp/j/2000/11/29/jp20001129_44763.html.

factor of “Xianxingzhe” was that it was promoted as world-class technologically advanced robot.

The seriousness of the debut, the amusing look of the robot, and its incapability, in many people’s eyes, created a Kuso effect that is worth teasing.¹²

The Taiwanese Internet community, specifically, was amused by the in-capabilities of the “Xianxingzhe” robot. Memes of the robot’s incapability became popular. People started mocking not only the movement of the robot but also its other aspects such as the design, aesthetics, and outdatedness. They made amusing stories of the robot and imagined how absurd it is for the news to

report such debut. Interestingly, Xianxingzhe gained its fame not from media coverage of its debut but the memes people created. The memes of Xianxingzhe became an early sign of how news could become Internet memes among the Chinese online communities, setting the ground for future Kuso development in China.¹³

(Figure 2: the Xianxingzhe Robot)

As time passed, not only had Kuso culture been integrated into many other cultures but a lot of interesting cultural phenomena had been developed from

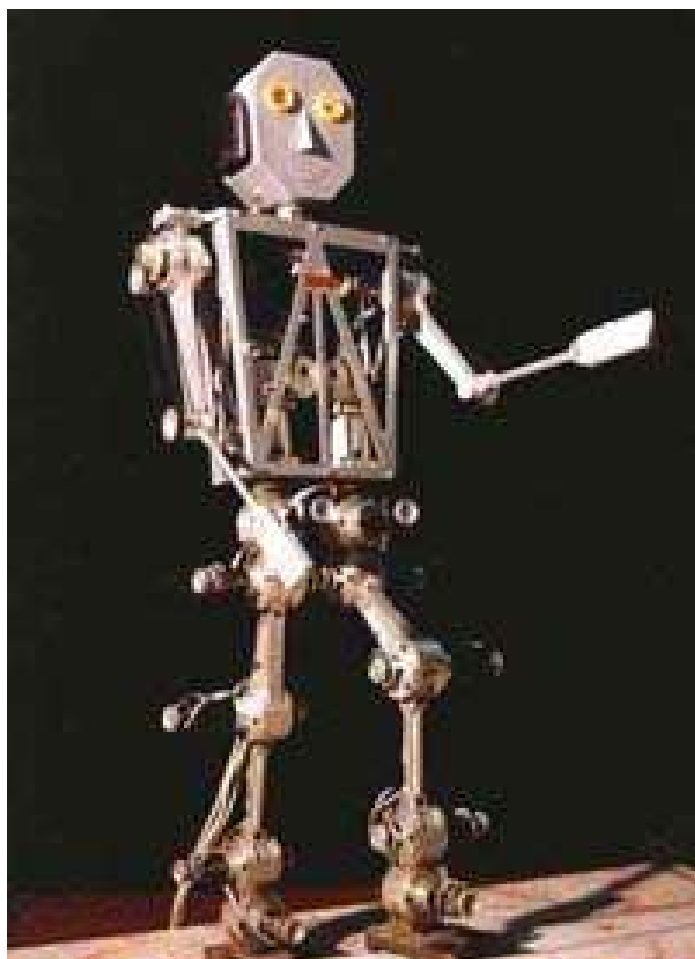


Figure2¹

¹² “啊，说起来‘先行者’还有人记得吗？ So, Does Anyone Still Remember Xianxingzhe Robot?,” accessed May 4, 2021, <https://user.guancha.cn/main/content?id=188212>.

¹³ 先行者 Xianxingzhe. (n.d.). Retrieved May 04, 2021, from <https://evctw.fandom.com/wiki/%E5%85%88%E8%A1%8C%E8%80%85>

Kuso. Some of those new phenomena were no longer meant to serve as negative meanings like the original meaning of Kuso. Instead, they now have neutral or even positive meanings. For example, In Hongkong, the usage of the word “无厘头” (Wulitou) is closely related to Kuso. The word “Wulitou” was originally a curse word in the Cantonese language, which means “no rules” or “no origination”. This is like the curse word “bastard” in a western context, where the curse of the word came from having no origination (bastards being people with no legitimate origination, Wulitou being people with no rules and origination).¹⁴ However, Steven Chou, one of the most influential Cantonese movie directors, had changed “Wulitou” into an influential art form that had a great impact on generations of Chinese. In Steven Chou’s films, “Wulitou” is used as a technique that includes pun usage, a mixture of various language (such as the expression I 服了 You, mixing Chinese and English into Chinglish), as well as blurring lines between seriousness and frivolousness (the character could be in a serious fight and act amusingly the next).¹⁵

All the techniques above are prevalent in the usage of Kuso, and they will continue to contribute to the development of new Kuso products. Nowadays, the word Kuso applies to phenomena that are equivalent to irony, juxtaposition, and assortments that do not make sense in the traditional context. It allows people to be free about their expressions and deliver unexpected results. By blending different elements together and breaking the lines of serious art, Kuso became an impactful weapon for new forms of artworks. In the next section, I will describe how Kuso had developed in China mainland. Along with the development of the Internet in China mainland, Kuso had made a great impact in mainland China and derived multiple valuable new-cultural products

¹⁴ 香港商业电台雷霆 881 《光明顶》. *Hongkong Business Television Leiting "Guangmingding" TV Show*, 2010.

¹⁵ “周星驰无厘头电影对中国文化转型的影响. Steven Chou's Wulitou Movie's Impact to Chinese Cultural Development,” accessed May 4, 2021, <https://xuewen.cnki.net/CJFD-DY LX201215020.html>.

upon traditional Chinese culture.

Kuso in China - the Little Fatty Meme

The development of Kuso culture in mainland China started in the early 2000s, as the Chinese cyber community developed. The word Kuso is usually referred to with the Chinese word “恶搞” (Egao). The word “Egao” was originally intended to mean “messing with something with bad intention”, with “E” being bad intention and “gao” meaning messing with. Through time, the word had become something completely different. “Egao” is now a cultural phenomenon in China that is prevalent among the Chinese online community. It is commonly referred to as a form of derivative work, like videos mocking movies or gossiping about celebrities.¹⁶

In the early 2000s, the early works of “Egao” have just started to be developed. People started taking interesting photos online and editing them with Adobe Photoshop, usually intended to make fun of the people or objects in the photo. One of the earliest examples is the “Little Fatty Meme”. In 2003, a 16-year-old Chinese high school student named Zhijun Qian participated in a transportation meeting in Shanghai. During the meeting, a photographer took a picture of Zhijun and instantly thought that the facial expression of Zhijun was amusing, so he uploaded the photo online (Figure 3, the original picture of Zhijun Qian):¹⁷

¹⁶ “Experts Gather Talking about the ‘Egao’ Culture,” accessed May 4, 2021, <http://news.sina.com.cn/pc/2006-08-10/27/2396.html>.

¹⁷ 互联网畅想杰克, “17年前, 因一张照片爆红的‘网红小胖’, 如今结婚生女模样大变. 17 Years Ago, a Picture Changed a Boy's Life,” October 22, 2020, https://k.sina.com.cn/article_7234335726_1af3333ee00100zujf.html?from=ent&subch=star.



Figure 3¹⁸

Zhijun had a funny expression on his face, and the picture went viral in various Internet forums. People started photoshopping this picture for entertainment, even starting forums solely to exchange photoshop-ed pictures of Zhijun (Figure 4&5, Photoshop-ed picture of Zhijun, examples of

¹⁸ 互联网畅想杰克, “17 年前, 因一张照片爆红的‘网红小胖’, 如今结婚生女模样大变. 17 Years Ago, a Picture Changed a Boy's Life,” October 22, 2020, https://k.sina.com.cn/article_7234335726_1af3333ee00100zujf.html?from=ent&subch=star.



Figure 5



Figure 4

the Little Fatty Meme).¹⁹

Though it is unethical to exchange and mess with pictures of others without their recognition,

Zhijun became instantly famous. He not only

started participating in all kinds of TV shows, but

he also made it to *The Independent* (the Asian version).²⁰ He is described as a new cultural

phenomenon, constantly being interviewed by all kinds of TV networks. In the following paragraphs,

I will be introducing another, perhaps even more significant, example of early “Egao” culture in

China: *Murder caused by a Steamed Bun*.

¹⁹ 互联网畅想杰克, “17 年前, 因一张照片爆红的‘网红小胖’, 如今结婚生女模样大变. 17 Years Ago, a Picture Changed a Boy's Life,” October 22, 2020, https://k.sina.com.cn/article_7234335726_1af3333ee00100zujf.html?from=ent&subch=star.

²⁰ 互联网畅想杰克, “17 年前, 因一张照片爆红的‘网红小胖’, 如今结婚生女模样大变. 17 Years Ago, a Picture Changed a Boy's Life,” October 22, 2020, https://k.sina.com.cn/article_7234335726_1af3333ee00100zujf.html?from=ent&subch=star.

Kuso in China - Murder caused by a Steamed Bun

Murder caused by a Steamed Bun was an Internet viral video edited by freelancer Ge Hu. The video was a derivative work to Director Kaige Chen's movie *Wuji*. Kaige Chen is one of the most influential directors in China. In 2005, he published *Wuji* and received mixed reviews. Most audiences were deeply impressed with the visuals in the movie, yet the plot of the movie was often questioned to be stupid.²¹ One comment from *Nanfangdushi Newspaper* wrote that: "Other than the beautiful visuals, the entire film was left with well-polished Shakespearean dialogues that only seems philosophical. The plot of the movie is stupid, yet it tried to package the story as a Shakespearean tale. There are no touching moments, no climax, maybe some entertainment. The second half of the movie attempted to touch the audience with its dialogue but had a comedic effect, and the cinema was filled with laughter".²² Below is the poster of the movie *Wuji* (Figure 6, left) and its derivative video *Murder caused by a steamed bun* (Figure 7, right).²³

²¹ "Wuji/ Master of the CRIMSON ARMOR (2005)," accessed May 4, 2021, <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1154356-promise>.

²² "Nanfangdushi News: The Wuji That I Have Seen," accessed May 4, 2021, <https://ent.sina.com.cn/r/m/2005-11-30/0944912526.html>.

²³ "还记得《一个馒头引发的血案》吗？这个网络恶搞第一人，要回归了。Do You Still Remember 'Murder Caused by a Steamed Bun'? Ge Hu Is Coming Back!," October 22, 2020, https://www.sohu.com/a/426532200_99964678.



Figure 6



Figure 7

The plot of *Wuji* started with a little girl seeking food in the wild during wartime. A rich boy saw her and gave her food in exchange for her freedom (making her his slave). The girl broke her promise of becoming his slave, took the food, and ran away. During her escape, she met a beautiful witch who made her an offer: if she is willing to give up true love and happiness, she could become the most beautiful woman in the world. The little girl accepted this offer, thus being cursed to not have true love and happiness forever. After she grew up, she became the most beautiful princess. Unfortunately, her king betrayed her and gave her to a powerful duke, who is actually the little boy from who the princess escaped from. The general tried to save her from being sent to the duke, yet he is not strong enough to do so due to his old age. So, the general gave his armor to his slave and the

slave successfully freed the princess by killing the king. The princess mistook the slave as the general, thus falling in love with the general. Because everyone thought that the general killed the king, all the general's men left him, and the general was trialed for treason. After many fights, the princess finally realizes that she loves the slave, and they ran away together, thus breaking the curse by the witch (As I have described, very complicated plot).

After watching the movie, freelancer Ge Hu decided to make a derivative video for *Wuji*. By taking the format of "PRC Government Law Report", Ge Hu created an entertaining video about the plot of *Wuji*. Because the story began with giving up true love for a steamed bun, the story was eventually reduced to a mysterious murder case caused by a steamed bun. This oversimplification, due to its well delivery and execution, went viral. The video had more click rates than the movie *Wuji*, and it infuriated Director Kaige Chen. On February 11th, 2006, Kaige Chen sued Ge Hu, claiming that "*a person could not have been so despicable to make such video*". However, On February 14th, 2006, almost all the Internet media platforms took the side of Ge Hu, claiming that the public should have the right to make derivative works as well as commenting on movies. They affirmed that Ge Hu's work brought entertainment to the public, and they stand by his rights. Most all the comments online supported Ge Hu, simultaneously giving negative reviews to *Wuji*.²⁴

The significance of this incident is that, before *Murder caused by a steamed bun*, the public had little influence on the movie industry other than buying tickets. While people were able to comment online about how they felt about a movie, they had little influence on how others would view this film. Professionals such as producers, actors, and directors, on the other hand, had a great impact on how the public views their work. They dominated media and mostly spoke fondly of each

other's work. The popularity of *Murder caused by a steamed bun* had proven that, first, the Internet had given the public the ability to gain influence towards professionals. The outraging response of Director Kaige Chen is often interpreted as professionals worrying about their influence being challenged. Secondly, Kuso gave birth to a new form of artwork, namely derivative work. Platforms such as Youtube and Bilibili heavily rely on derivative work from the public. In fact, Bilibili, now one of the most famous Chinese streaming service, was founded on derivative work. The name "Bilibili" was originated from the anime "A Certain Scientific Railgun", being a Kuso product itself. Finally, the Kuso development had blurred the line between professionals and non-professionals. With the help of social media and the Internet, anyone can potentially create influential videos and gain popularity. This created "grey area" jobs that seemed illegitimate but earn a lot of money, such as Youtubers.²⁵ To this day, YouTube's review mechanism and algorithms are still controversial. While some complain that, due to copy rights infringement, too many YouTube contents had been deleted, others complain that too little freedom are given to content creators.

Connection to Jay Chou

The examples above showcase some results of China's Kuso development in the early 2000s. There are a few similarities between the two cultural phenomena. First, both *Murder Caused by a Steamed Bun* and the "Little Fatty Meme" were derivative products. This is one unique feature to Kuso works, for merely all Kuso products are derived from some other original work. Secondly, both phenomena represented the grass-root community. Ge Hu, before creating the video, was an unfamous freelancer being constantly in between jobs. The creators behind the "Little Fatty Memes"

²⁵"People's News: the Lawsuit behind 'Murder Caused by a Steamed Bun,'" accessed May 4, 2021, <http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/22226/58646/index.html>.

were also in similar situations, being “nobodies” from the internet. Finally, both phenomena were results of juxtaposition. The “Little Fatty Meme” took pictures from the news and combined it with the technology of Adobe Photoshop. *Murder caused by a Steamed Bun* was a combination of TV show (PRC Government Law Report), video editing, and cinema.

The year 2000, when Kuso culture took flight, was approximately the same time when Jay Chou started his career. Chou was deeply influenced by Kuso and utilized similar techniques listed above. Much like Steven Chou, Jay Chou started from experimenting with Kuso. Later, he moved on to using Kuso to create his signature style and develop his own line of Kuso work. In his career, Chou had not only been recognized as a Kuso artist, but he had also developed his own breed of Kuso”musical techniques. There are four different aspects to Chou’s Kuso style that I will be introducing in the next section:

1. The juxtaposition of different cultural traditions
2. Lyric Writing
3. Arrangements and Instrumentation
4. Unexpected interpolations

In the following section, I will examine each technique using Chou’s pieces. By doing so, I will argue that Chou’s style is not only a product of Kuso culture but also significantly develops Kuso. His techniques reveal that applying Kuso to traditional culture could have a significant impact on cultural innovation.

Section 2: Jay Chou's Kuso Music and Techniques

Starting from his first album “Jay”, Chou’s music was deeply influenced by Japanese Kuso culture. At the beginning of this career, Jay Chou was a producer’s assistant in “BoDeMan” Music Studio. The release of the album “Jay” was a risk for “BoDeMan Music Studio”, because the contemporary audiences were not familiar with diverse integrated musical styles.²⁶ Audiences had never been exposed to Kuso music (music that is atypical to any specific genre), and the overall style of the album “Jay” is among R&B (rhythm and blues), New Hip-Hop, alongside Baroque style string arrangement, creating an interesting British vintage style.²⁷ His Spanish-style string accompaniment in “以父之名”[“In the name of God”]reminded many of film music instead of popular music.

Chou labeled many of his pieces under “无厘头” (Wulitou, a Japanese Kuso inspired Cantonese phrase)²⁸ and “Egao Culture” (the Kuso term used in both “Murder Caused by a steamed Bun” and the “Little Fatty Meme”). Both of those techniques often suggest a juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated techniques. Such correlation among techniques could create an interesting effect on the music. The phrase “Wulitou” is correlated with Kuso in an Asian context, both covering a range of meanings including juxtaposition, to mess with, and ridicule.²⁹ In Chou’s case, the element of juxtaposition is often inspired by Kuso culture (he marked many of his works as “无厘头”, such as “红模仿” [“Red Copy”]). This method of implementing juxtaposition in music takes different forms and had brought great popularity for Chou. I will be using five of the most significant songs of Chou as examples to demonstrate the four different aspects of Chou’s music listed above. The five

²⁶ Sohu Entertainment, “周杰伦从艺经历. Jay Chou's Career Path,” n.d., <http://music.yule.sohu.com/20050801/n226521207.shtml>.

²⁷ “【一点资讯】周杰伦 40 岁了：「为什么很少听别人的歌？」, Why Do Jay Chou Seldom Listen to Other People's Songs?,” accessed May 4, 2021, <http://www.yidianzixun.com/article/0L8EmDF>.

²⁸ 香港商业电台雷霆 881 《光明顶》. *Hongkong Business Television Leiting "Guangmingding" TV Show*, 2010.

²⁹ Zhongfeng Ren, “网络恶搞的传播学分析 - Internet Egao Culture's Communication Analysis,” 网络恶搞的传播学分析 - 百度文库, accessed May 6, 2021, <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/50657d315a8102d276a22f00.html>.

songs include “娘子”[“Wife”], “威廉古堡”[“William’s Castle”], “爱在西元前”[“Love before A.C.”], “青花瓷”[“Porcelain”], and “乱舞春秋” [“Flurrying Warring States”]. Using those examples, I will show that Chou’s music had used Kuso as an inspiration to create a new genre of music. Unlike other composers who use specific musical elements, such as scales and instrumentation, to evoke cultural traditions, Chou achieved the same effect without using those musical elements directly. Such composition technique creates Kuso music, and it can potentially serve as an inspiration to view culture in a different way, especially during the age of internet advancement.

The Juxtaposition of different cultural traditions

“Jazzy R&B with a taste of China”: (“娘子” 【“Wife”】)

First, the chord progression of “娘子”[“Wife”] is both sophisticated and interesting than most other popular music. Most chords in “娘子”[“Wife”] are either seventh or ninth chords and progress in unusual ways. For instance, the transition from A section of the music to B section uses the following chord progression:

$\text{Cm9} \rightarrow \text{Fm9} \rightarrow \text{Db69} \rightarrow \text{G7\#5}$ [the end of A] $\rightarrow \text{AbM7} \rightarrow \text{Db9} \rightarrow \text{Cm9} \rightarrow \text{Fm9}$

And the transition between B section to a varied A section (A2) used the following chord progression:

$\text{AbM7} \rightarrow \text{Db9} \rightarrow \text{Dm9} \rightarrow \text{G7\#5}$ (The end of B) $\rightarrow \text{Cm9} \rightarrow \text{Fm9} \rightarrow \text{Cm9} \rightarrow \text{Fm9}$

The first transition uses the G7#5 chord as a voice-leading tool, so the music, as it develops to the chorus gets “pushed” from Db69 to G7#5 to AbM7, where the notes all progress upward in the voice leading (Figure 8, voice leading of Db69, G7#5, AbM7).

Four Voice Progression:

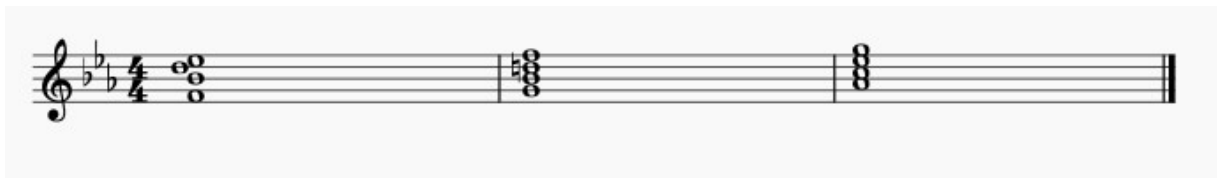


Figure 8

(All of which are upward-moving progression with voice leading)

Chou cleverly utilized the bII69 chord, a variation of a Neapolitan chord to evoke jazz like feelings. Moreover, he also utilized chord progressions atypical to popular music, such as the progression from V7 to VI7 (a deceptive progression).

As the chorus ends, the progression goes as:

AbM7 → Db9 → Dm9 → G7#5 (The end of B) → Cm9 → Fm9 → Cm9 → Fm9.

The voice leading here is:

Low Voice: Db(bii) → D(ii) → G(V) → C(I) [Perfect Authentic Cadential movement]

(Figure 9, the PAC voice leading)



Figure 9

This progression is impacting because of its voice leading. The first progression uses G7#5 → AbM7 to establish C minor to C# minor sidestep, being an uprising passing chord transition. The second progression uses Db9 → Dm9 to move back to C minor and use Dm9 → G7#5 (The end of B) → Cm9 to move back to the Cm9 → Fm9 of A section of the song (using a strong ii-V-i as cadence).

This type of progression and chord building here is most typically seen in jazz music (less so in pop music). In most popular music, the artist would typically only use chords I, ii, iv, V in the chosen key. By using those “jazzy chords”, Chou evokes jazz music traditions to modern audiences. However, the syncopations, clear rhythms, as well as casual style of singing all suggest that “娘子”[“Wife”] is a R&B piece. Moreover, Chou also managed to evoke Chinese musical traditions through western instrumentations (I will be explaining this in the “The Use of Instruments in “娘子” [“Wife”]” part). This juxtaposition of jazz, R&B, and Chinese traditional music makes the song “Wife” Kuso music.

Vowel Formulation:

Another juxtaposition technique that Chou utilized is borrowing vowel formulation patterns from different cultures and contexts, which I shall exemplify with Chou’s “William’s Castle”. “William’s Castle” is a good demonstration of two typical “Jay Chou’s Kuso” elements: one, the rhyming of the music replaces the vowel of the actual word. This is a great contrast to the system built into the four-tone Chinese vowels. Instead of *téng wàn zhí wù* (lyrics in “William’s Castle”), having 2nd 4th 2nd 4th vowels, Chou sings the vowels according to the notes of the lyric (C# D C# D). Interestingly, because the two notes create a similar musical motion to the Chinese tones, the lyrics, and the song blends seemingly. In most cases, an artist would have to change his dictation to make sure the pitch is delivered correctly. However, Fang, Chou’s lyric writer, wrote the lyrics according to the pitch, making the two blends seamlessly. The same pattern can be seen multiple times in the introduction of “William’s Castle” (typically at the end of the first two poetic lines):

2nd Poetic line: pá...dì fénmù (2nd 4th 2nd 4th)

When it comes to the fourth poetic line, the lyric ends with the character 土 (tǔ) , which is

the third tone. To fix this, Chou adds a creative process of first singing the second tone (so the pitch goes up), and he would make his vowel “slide down” into the third tone.

4th Poetic line: ní tú => tǔ (2nd=>2nd=>3rd)

As seen in the example above, though there are many creative aspects to Chou’s pieces, all the techniques commonly borrow an idea from Kuso. They either break certain rules while still evoking the necessary feelings to a specific culture (which I dive deeper in later paragraph) or make a juxtaposition out of traditions. All those techniques together create a unique Kuso style, namely “Chou’s style”.

The use of Musical Motions in 乱舞春秋/ Flurrying Warring States

Chou also uses musical motions to blur the line between cultural traditions. A Western audience recognizes a waltz from its triple meter and other characteristics, and musicians can evoke specific cultural contexts with these characteristics. However, Chou takes a Kuso approach to his composition.

The title of Chou’s song “Flurrying Warring State” refers to The Warring State period in Chinese history. In the beginning of the piece, Chou used a traditional Chinese pentatonic scale - 宫,商,角, 征,羽 – which often corresponds to scale degree 12356 in the Western diatonic scale. After establishing the memorable musical motions and Chinese traditional musical context, he shifts his piece to a diatonic scaled. This shift does not distract the audience, for Chou used a clever Kuso method to make such change seamless.

“Flurrying Warring State” starts with a straightforward melody line (as shown in Figure 10):



Figure 10

We see two obvious musical motions here: F-D (in bar 2 and 3) and D-A (in bar 5 and 7). Chou takes three notes, D, F, A from the pentatonic scale to evoke a sense of traditional Chinese musical context, and he also lays the foundation for his diatonic variations by establishing the F-D and D-A musical motions.

As the music progresses, specifically when it reaches the middle of its bridge, Chou uses diatonic scale for the first time (Figure 11, the appearance of Bb brings in a semitone, which should not be seen in traditional Chinese pentatonic music):



Figure 11

The occurrence of the semitone indicates that Chou is now using diatonic scale system, yet this shift from pentatonic to diatonic is seamless. How does this happen? There are two techniques implemented here. First, the musical motion of F-C evokes similar memory preestablished in the audience's mind (the musical motion of D-A). The two musical motions, both being a perfect fourth,

are mirrors of each other. Since the melody line from Figure 11 directly follows the melody one from Figure 10, the audience instantly recognize this mirroring effect and puts much attention on it.

Secondly, because this mirroring effect leaves such a strong impression on the audience's year, audiences are imprinted with the same impression of the first melody (Figure 10). The audience's ear was already "preset" by Chou. They do not recognize the semitone because their attention was drawn away from it. Chou evoked the pre-established musical motion, specifically using the mirroring effect to create strong musical impressions.

In the audience mind, their perception changes as below:

1. Hearing pentatonic scale → Correlating it to Chinese traditional music
2. Hearing the musical motion of F-D, D-A → Correlating the motive with the music →

Musical Motion = Chinese style

3. Hearing the mirroring F-C → correlating it with previous musical motions F-D → No

Semitones heard!

Chou even goes even further with similar technique. At the end of the piece, he goes on and constantly use diatonic scale:



Figure 12

The E-F relationship brings in another semitone, which is clearly another shift away from pentatonic music. However, because the F-D musical motion is so strongly imprinted in the audience' minds, the semitone from F-E-D is noticed as F-D, and the E is treated as a casual passing note. Moreover, Chou adds another “cover” to the semitone by mumbling through the lyrics here. This casual style of singing is prevalent in R&B music, so he “covers” the semitones by incorporating R&B techniques into his piece.

Chou's usage of musical motion here is both interesting and bizarre. When you hear the melody of Star Wars, you think about Star Wars, nothing else. However, Chou uses his unique Kuso technique of having a juxtaposition of the two scales. On the one hand, he incorporates diatonic scale to pentatonic scale without being noticed, making his music technically not Chinese traditional music. He uses musical motions freely to the point that does not evoke cultural context. On the other hand, the mumbling of lyrics, namely the R&B style of singing, blends seamlessly to his “cover”. By incorporating both techniques simultaneously, Chou successfully juxtapositions unrelating elements into one common style: Chou's style. By doing so, Chou creates a whole new musical world, a world where unrelated elements can become one. He stitches different musical elements like a splendid

tailer, creating music that is bound by no border.

Lyrics

“娘子”【“Wife”】 : Lyrics & Singing

The lyric writing of the song “娘子” [“Wife”] is close to that of a traditional Chinese poem (similar to the arrangements of Chou, it is neither modern nor traditional). Many word choices in the song are borrowed directly from famous poems, those words include “折柳” (broken willow branch), “一壶好酒” (fine wine), “店小二” (the waiter), “漫天黄沙” (sandstorm), and “景色入秋” (sight of Autumn). However, the formatting of “娘子”[“Wife”]’s lyric is atypical to traditional Chinese poems.

Take the first two lines of “Wife” as an example:

(Space)娘~子

(Space)Wi~fe

(Space)娘子却依旧每日

(Space)Wife is still every day

In a western context, entering from a weak beat refers to a technique called syncopation, yet it is atypical for syncopation to appear in a traditional Chinese-styled song (perhaps an imitated traditional Chinese style). Because the common audience is used to the format of Chinese poems, this novelty composition style created another layer of Kuso within Chou’s music. The words in the lyrics evoke traditional Chinese musical feeling in the audience’s ear, yet the syncopation suggests otherwise (typically a R&B type).

Moreover, to make this piece even more Kuso, Chou simplified the four-tone Chinese tone

system and made all alphabets the fourth tone (Figure 18).³⁰

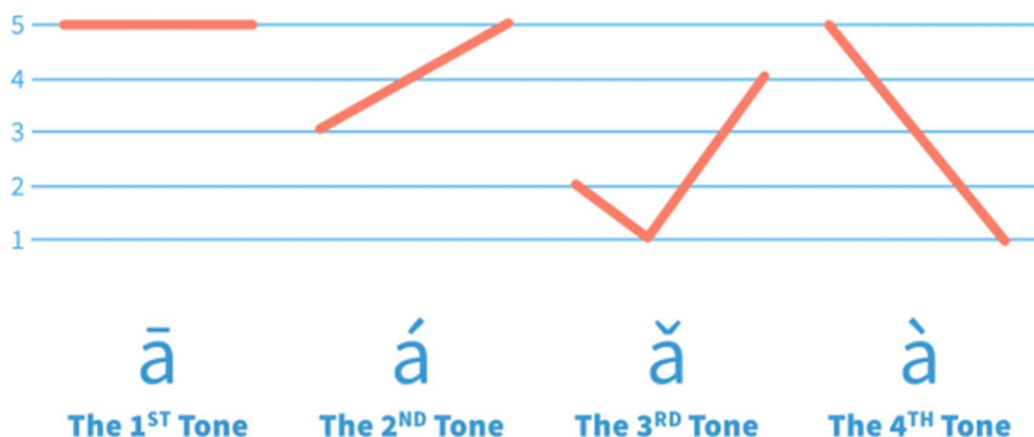


Figure 13

Traditionally, characters in the Chinese language are identified by their tones. Take the tone combination for “han” as an example: 憨, 韩, 喊, 汉, four characters respectively use different tones, even though they use the same spelling. This gives them completely different meanings, with 憨 meaning foolish, 韩 used for family names (mine among them), 喊 meaning yelling, and 汉 used for ethnicity in China (mine too). Chou, however, typically either uses the 4th tone or no tones for a lot of characters in singing the lyrics. Such casual approach to the Chinese character pronunciation plays well with Chou’s music, creating an unserious layer upon the serious traditional Chinese poetic lyrics.

The same technique is also evident in his later piece “双截棍” [“Wii”], where the audience is being placed in a weird position: they perceive the song to be “Chinese”, yet there are certain qualities that do not match their perception. The song seemed to have many elements, yet it does not

³⁰ “How to Pronounce The Four Tones in Mandarin,” How to Pronounce The Four Tones in Mandarin - ChineseFor.Us, May 17, 2020, <https://chinese4.us/lessons/guide-chinese-tone-four-tones-mandarin/>.

fully follow through any of them. Instead of following the traditional Chinese poem writing of “依字行腔” (using the four tones of poems for rhythmic structure), Chou uses groove/rhythm to break down his lyrics. The audience are often confused about the start and end of his lyrics (because of the syncopations), yet they still perceive Chou’s lyrics and rhymes to be Chinese. Chou also mumbles through many of his lyrics, just to bring in some unseriousness in the serious lyrics written by Fang. This mumbling of lyrics eventually became one of Chou’s most famous characteristic, becoming part of Chou’s style.

爱在西元前/Love Before Christ: Lyric Writing

Most of Chou’s song’s lyrics were written by Wenshan Fang, a famous lyric writer employed by “Aerfa Record Studio”. Although Fang only had a degree from a higher vocational school, he did conclusive research on how to write unique lyrics, which eventually developed into a Kuso element in Chou’s music.

In Chou’s “爱在西元前” (Love before A.d.), the first lyric line:

“古巴比伦王颁布了汉摩拉比法典. 刻在黑色的玄武岩 距今已经三千七百多年”

“Ancient Babylon King established the code of Hammurabi, served on a black Basalt. It has been 3700 years.”

Fang used a historical declarative sentence to first establish the background image for the entire song, using keywords such as ancient Babylon King, Hammurabi, black Basalt, and 3700 years. This sets the context of the song in ancient Babylon, including the location, time, and action of the characters.

Then, at the second poetic line, he suddenly took a drastically different approach of using a colloquial poetic line:

“你在橱窗里 凝视碑文的字眼 我却在旁静静欣赏你那张我深爱的脸”

“You standing in front of the show window, staring at the words on the Stone

Me standing beside you starring at that face of love”

He used the juxtaposition between serious declarative phrasing and casual colloquial phrasing to create a montage, jumping back and forth between ancient and modern times.³¹ Again, this jumping back and forth makes the lyrics of Chou’s songs atypical to any specific writing style. Instead, Fang’s lyrics create a new style: build upon traditional Chinese poem writing but also being colloquial and modern.

On the one hand, Fang’s lyrics passed on elements from traditional Chinese poem writing. It utilized the phrasing and words from Chinese poems as a model for lyric writing. On the other hand, to avoid being too hard to understand for modern audience (a common complaint toward Chinese poem from contemporary audience), Fang also used colloquial words and poetic lines to convey the hidden meanings in the lyrics. Notice that, like Chou, Fang was mostly evoking the feeling of cultural elements but not bound by any of them specifically, not afraid blend cultural conventions for creative purposes.

青花瓷/ Porcelain: Lyric Writing

Another such example is “青花瓷” [“Porcelain”], one of Chou’s most famous Chinese style music.

In the chorus, Fang wrote:

“天青色等烟雨，而我在等你”

“The cyan sky is waiting for a misty rain, like I am waiting for you”

There are two juxtapositions here. The first is the juxtaposition between realism and abstraction. Cyan sky is a description of color. However, the color of the cyan sky is most seen on

³¹ WenHua View, 20110612, JayChou and Wenshan Fang, Decade Sword, 29:30-30:30

ceramic kiln instead of porcelain. Moreover, the cyan sky's color is most obvious after heavy rain but not misty rain. Fang took two very specific elements in Chinese history and painted an inaccurate picture. Yet, this abstraction created a beautiful picture that matches the vision of Fang. In other words, Fang had sacrificed realism in exchange for mystic feelings. He borrows concepts from reality and made it fantastical.

The second juxtaposition is between ancient Chinese writing and modern Chinese writing. The poetic line “而我在等你” (like I am waiting for you) is modern, for ancient Chinese writing seldom used pronouns such as “我” (me) and “你” (you). However, both the rhythm pattern of this poetic line and the way the two pronouns are correlated to each other as a parallel used a technique named “对仗” (antithesis), which is prevalent for ancient Chinese poem writing. The juxtaposition between ancient and modern Chinese creates another fantastical aspect to Fang's lyrics, playing into the serious yet playful style of Jay Chou.³²

William's Castle: Lyric Writing

In “William's castle” the Gothic theme evoked by the instrumentation is foreshadowing the thematic of the lyrics. As Chou started singing, the first sentence sung:

“籐蔓植物 爬滿了伯爵的墳墓”

“The vines covered the earl's grave”

“古堡裡一片荒蕪 長滿雜草的泥土”

“A barren soil overgrown with weeds in the old castle”

Fang used different elements in the lyrics to evoke a Gothic feeling, from “earl” to “old castle”, setting up the appearance of Dracula, werewolf, and witches later in the lyrics. There is one specific

³² TuCaoDaHui, Wenshan Fang Speech, Talking on Qinghuaci

Kuso technique that is worth noticing in Fang's lyrics. Fang breaks stereotypical images of the characters in his lyrics to create a Kuso and comedic effect. For instance, Fang wrote that:

“不會騎掃把的胖女巫 用拉丁文唸咒語啦啦鳴”

“The fat witch that could not ride a broom is yelling “Yalawu” in Latin”

The image of a witch is stereotypically correlated with “riding brooms” and “skinny body”.

Fang, on the other hand, painted a picture of a fat witch who could not even ride a broom, breaking stereotypes and jamming seemingly unfitting traits together. This way of describing things is prevalent in the song, such as “the French Butler Pig”, “The vampire princess who only eats rat with AB type blood”, and “vampire William the 2nd has whiskers”. All the descriptions above are anti-stereotypical Gothic elements that do not make much sense. Because Fang was consistent with his descriptions and world building, the lyrics build an image of a fantastical world with all kinds of comedic Gothic characters. By breaking the stereotypes in such a way, Fang blends serious images of characters with comedic reality, creating a Kuso world.

Chou's Use of Timbre

The Use of Instruments in “娘子” 【“Wife”】

Chou recognized that the timbre of a guitar can be like that of Pipa (a traditional Chinese instrument). Much like the creation of impossible meat (vegan meat), Chou attempted to evoke the feeling of Pipa with the playing of Guitar (Below are pictures of typical classical guitar and Pipa).



Figure 14 Image of Pipa and Guitar³³

Pipa is often played using the technique of “轮指弹法” (tremolo). Though both guitar and pipa use tremolo, the specific technique of the two varies. In playing the guitar, tremolo usually appears in the note, where each finger takes turns plucking the string. Pipa, on the other hand, typically uses five fingers for tremolo, and those five fingers would play in reverse to the direction that a guitarist would pluck the string. In other words, in playing the guitar, the guitarist would “pick” the string with the guitarist’s fingers (all the fingers but the little finger). Pipa players, on the other hand, fiddle the strings. The pipaist would use the surface of his or her fingernails to fiddle the strings. Moreover, in playing tremolo of the guitar, the guitarist would typically use different strengths in picking the strings, creating a different timbre in the tremolo. Pipa, on the other hand, requires the musician to play with equal strength. Because each finger has the different natural strength, playing the pipa requires years of training to achieve each finger playing with the same strength.

In playing the guitar for the piece “娘子” [“Wife”], Chou imitated the tremolo of the pipa.

³³ “琵琶就是吉他？原来它们都是同一种乐器的后代！”，Sohu, June 25, 2018, https://www.sohu.com/a/237745151_99922103.

What is important to notice is that Chou did not completely adopt the playing of the pipa with the guitar. Instead, he merely evoked the feeling of tremolo for pipa. This created an interesting effect. In a way, Chou takes the “stereotypes” of pipa playing and used it within a western musical context. This created an atypical style: the piece does not fully resemble any specific musical genre. The instrumentation and style are from Western musical context, yet it somehow evokes the feeling of Chinese musical traditions. This type of Kuso creative process is prevalent in Chou’s work, eventually evolving into Chou’s unique Kuso Chinese style of music.

The Use of Instruments in 威廉古堡/ William’s Castle

Chou used his audience’s familiarity with various instruments to evoke certain cultural elements. “William’s Castle” used both an organ and the theremin (figures 23 and 24).



Figure 15³⁴

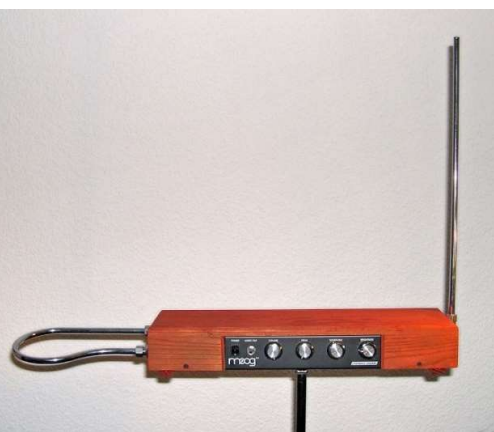


Figure 16³⁵

The organ is typically associated with Christian rituals and old castles. The theremin is an early electronic instrument invented by Leon Theremin. The instrument is controlled with two metal antennas that sense the position of the musician’s hands, which transforms the movements to

³⁴ “Organ Studio,” The University Auditorium Organ | Organ Studio | College of the Arts | University of Florida, accessed May 7, 2021, <https://arts.ufl.edu/sites/organ-studio/the-university-auditorium-organ/>.

³⁵ “Theremin,” Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, May 4, 2021), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theremin>.

oscillators for frequency with one hand and amplitude with the other. Audiences associate the sound of a theremin with science fiction or horror themes, as in movies such as *Monster House*, *Spellbound*, and *The Delicate Delinquent*.

The combination of the pipe organ and theremin creates a Kuso layer in “William’s Castle”. The organ evokes a Gothic-like theme, and the theremin evokes a fantastical and mystical feeling. The story of “William’s Castle” includes Gothic elements such as vampires, witches, and werewolves, but also gave them a modern context.

Unexpected interpolation in songs: 乱舞春秋/ Flurrying Warring States

Sampling is a common technique in electronic music production today, but Chou’s kuso use of the technique is unique. Chou often takes samples from sources that seem unfit to the style of the music. Rather than destroying the coherence of a piece, the Kuso aesthetic unifies the disparate use of sample sources. At 3:38 in “Flurrying Warring State”, a ringing phone suddenly interrupts the music, and Chou orders food delivery, saying, “喂？我在配唱，鸡排饭，加个蛋啊” [“Hello? I’m recording, fried chicken rice please, add an egg.”]

This unexpected interruption helps define the structure of the piece. “Flurrying Warring State” is a long piece with many variations. Instead of following a similar pattern of A-B-A-B in most popular music, Chou used 8 sections in the form ABCDEFGHEE’E”. Several effects here are significant. First, this sample breaks up the repetition of chorus E, creating multiple layers to the piece. Secondly, Chou’s phone call breaks the fourth wall of the piece (meaning as a character he realizes that he is fictional in the music video). By ordering food as ordinary person, he reminds the audience that he is a singer playing a character in the Warring States period. It is hard to imagine the breaking of the fourth wall could appear in as early as 2004 in such a way. Finally, in many of

Chou's pieces, he interpolates unrelated sections in other songs in similar yet different approach. In "Wii" Chou plays an unrelated piano solo in a metal R&B piece, and in "Turkish Ice-cream" he asks Basketball player Jeremy Lin to play "Turkish March" in a Latin Chinese fusion R&B piece. The dramatic contrast becomes part of Chou's signature style, namely the "Kuso" Chou's style.

Section 3: Reflection on Kuso Culture

At the beginning of this paper, I have defined Kuso, identified its origin, and explained how Kuso was developed in China. In the second part of the paper, I introduced how Jay Chou, one of the most significant musicians in China, utilized Kuso to enrich his musical techniques. Using Kuso, Chou was able to make his music unique from other musicians, breaking cultural conventions and creating new music fusions. In this section, I will summarize the connection between Chou and Kuso as well as discussing how such a connection might help people to view cultural conventions differently at this age of internet advancement.

The four techniques that I have exemplified in the previous section all aim to achieve a Kuso effect in Chou's favor. This cultural phenomenon is called "Egao" in China, and it had triggered a lot of different cultural varied products. Instead of merely "jamming various elements together", Jay Chou attempted to create new styles upon the original ones. Though such approach is new to the music industry, as my examples in section one has showcased, it is not new to the Kuso online development. As people are now exposed to more information in less depth, the autonomous space for creativity would have to shift accordingly.³⁶ This means that, compared to a traditional approach of going in depth with every single culture and evoking them individually, combinations of different

³⁶ "网络恶搞文化论文. Internet Egao Culture," accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.wenmi.com/article/pzi8vf04qj2r.html>.

cultures, even the mockery of cultures, become a key to creating arts.

For Chou, the pre-established cultures are materials for his recreations. Or perhaps, a better way to characterize Chou's pieces is the label "derivative". Chou does not directly reference the traditions. Instead, he insists on either having a juxtaposition among different cultures or respective mockery of the cultures. Though the first generations of Kuso artists, such as Ge Hu or "Little Fatty", cannot achieve the depth and sophistication of other art forms, the development of the internet had greatly aided Kuso culture in blossoming into a more sophisticated one. Jay Chou, as a Chinese popular music legend, had demonstrated that Kuso culture had not only become mainstream but also created great impact to traditional art. Many artists and audiences show even greater interest to Kuso products compared to the ones that it derived from. Moreover, differing from traditional media professionals, Kuso/Egao artists represent grassroots, and they approach traditional media products consciously to produce derivative works. Though such derivative products are controversial, there is no denial that their popularity and growing sophistication demonstrate that the Kuso artists have become an emerging power in the world of art and media production. Those new artists have given a voice to the audience in response to the "professionals" and reveal that art can be recreated from the perspective of an audience.

Kuso arts can, however, become problematic. For instance, a few commonly disputed rules on YouTube include the fine line between teasing and personal attack, intellectual property infringement, and derivative art creation, as well as vulgar culture and earthiness culture. The degree of integration of Kuso in pre-established great art requires constant retrospection, for there is a difference between deriving from something and copying from something. Kuso shows that derivative works can also be original. In Kuso, artists can freely establish their work because their

works are no longer bound by specific styles. Instead, all the elements available belong to part of Kuso. Each combination of traditional art forms brings in another layer of Kuso, creating infinite possibilities of new lines of original works. Perhaps, not only in the field of music but in other artistic fields, Chou's attempts could serve as an inspiration to create other Kuso works. The cultural conventions that separate cultures from each other, in the 21st century, can be abrogated for the sake of fusion and revolution. Perhaps, by intentionally blurring the lines between traditional art forms, artists would now be able to explore a field of a creative process that has been rather unexplored.³⁷

It is also worth pointing out that Chou's Kuso style, this way of combining various cultural traditions, is a representation of Postmodern structuralism. The core of Kuso culture is to capture heated topics and construct them in a unique way of thinking, not a mechanized duplication, even though the original motivation is only to express individualized interpretations. The strategy which those Kuso artists took are standard to Postmodern structuralism. Those new artists utilize an in-depth structure of interpreting traditional cultures and present them in a playful and entertaining platform. This often puts the people, or works, who are being Kuso-ed in an awkward position. On the one hand, it is undeniable that those derivative works are, in many ways, disrespectful. Those original artworks might be taken out of context, utilized in ways that would infringe the rights of the artists. On the other hand, those derivative works also represent the response people have towards the original artworks, and such responses, as criticism towards artistry, are valuable.

Kuso culture allows the public to become critics. In many cases, Kuso artists, due to their quantity, capture keys to criticize traditional conventions and formulate formats to replicate such process. The prevalence of Kuso culture is due to its adaptivity to current society. Compared to

³⁷ Lei Zhou, "网络文化论文 网络'恶搞'亚文化狂欢的反思. Retrospection of 'Egao' Asian Culture Carnival," accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.yixuelunwen.com/dajjemi/567145.html>.

traditional arts, Kuso is easier to understand and creates strong resonance, especially for younger generations. As Kuso artists, or perhaps Kuso audience, people should recognize the pros and cons of Kuso. Though there are benefits and positive effects that Kuso has brought, there are negative impacts of Kuso too.³⁸ First, Kuso culture often causes the diminishing of our original cultures and arts. It could cause society to be filled with too much criticism to the point that damages the creation of new art other than Kuso. Secondly, Kuso culture challenges society's moral bottom line and damages our online community. YouTube, as a famous platform for derivative work, is often accused of ugly attacking language usage and copy rights infringement. The derivative contents created by Kuso artists, due to its grass-root nature, makes it vulnerable to being loyal to such rules. Finally, Kuso culture have negative impacts on mainstream culture. Kuso culture on its own cannot become the only mainstream because the culture is dependent on derivative interpretations of mainstream culture. It can become an excuse for offenders to blatantly violate other people's rights and make money from doing so.³⁹ The takeaway is that we should encourage the critical spirit and cultural innovation from Kuso, but we should also actively participate in critically evaluating Kuso culture. We should try to find the line between derivative work and copyright infringements. The development of Kuso culture reveals much about how arts and cultures can be reinterpreted in the modern age, both positively and negatively, so we must work even more carefully at this interesting and exciting age of development.

³⁸ Yumin Gao, "恶搞的文化解释[J]. 西北大学学报. Northwestern University Scholarship Paper: Explanation to Kuso Culture and Its Development," 2007.

³⁹ (Zhang, 数字媒介技术影响下的恶搞文化. *Kuso culture under the influence of Digital Media Technology Development* 2015)

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