

Fangirl Culture in The Chinese Rock Music Scene

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Abstract

In the summer of 2019, a TV variety show about indie/rock bands became popular in China. Since then, these so-called 'underground' bands have experienced idolization and were moved to a mainstream stage. This also brought a large group of fangirls into the Chinese rock music scene. Such a large-scale invasion of female fans poses a challenge for the rock culture scene which is usually considered to be 'masculine'. In this project, I explore how the participation of female fans challenge the gender norms constructed in the discourse of Chinese rock and bring changes to the Chinese rock music scene.

Keywords: Chinese rock; fangirl; popular music; authenticity; gender

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

For a long time, the rock music scene has been constructed and presented as a “man's world” (Larsen, 2017) dominated by male musicians and male fans in which women, although involved, are often characterized as something attached to the men. In this case, the characteristics of masculinity have often been considered to be closely related to the authenticity of rock and roll, and it is also used as a criterion to distinguish between two different genres of popular music: as ‘rock’ is usually considered ‘masculine’, while “pop” seems to be more ‘feminine’(Coates, 1997; Warwick, 2015). Such stereotypes between rock and pop seem to have become a global trend, and there is no exception in Chinese society.

In the Chinese context, it seems that people who identify themselves as ‘real’ rock fans tend to look down on pop idols and their fans (the so-called fangirls), and often deliberately want to keep a certain distance from them. These idols and their fan groups are usually associated with descriptions such as ‘mainstream’, ‘commercial’, and ‘feminine’. Therefore, by drawing a line between the two, people who are engaged in the rock music scene can emphasize their identity of being ‘real’ and also maintain the authenticity of rock culture that they support at the same time.

However, in the summer of 2019, a musical variety show *The Big Band* (also known by its Chinese name “乐队的夏天”, pronounced “*yuedui de xiatian*”) became a big hit among Chinese audiences. This program featured 31 indie/rock bands performing music styles including indie rock, punk, metal, funk, etc., as well as several celebrities in China, aiming to bring about the ‘Hot 5 bands’ of China for summer 2019. Through the program, a lot of relatively underground and indie rock bands in China were repackaged as pop idols and were introduced to a wider audience. Such an attempt of turning those ‘underground’ or ‘semi-underground’ rock stars into popular idols deemed to be particularly attractive to fangirls who are usually involved in the pop music scenes. As a result, after the show was aired, an unprecedented number of fangirls began to

participate in the rock music scene as active consumers, bringing fangirl culture into the rock industry as a result.

Considering the long-standing gap between rock and pop, the emergence of fangirls in the Chinese rock music scene seems to have received a lot of criticism. The close relationship between the fangirls and pop music and femininity may be considered to be a challenge to the authenticity of Chinese rock, and there are even commentaries on social media indicating that fangirls should 'get out of' the rock music world (JinZhiQieGe, 2019).

Located outside the mainstream, which follows the global dynamic of 'gendering' music genres, are China's underground music events. In particular are band performances held regularly in small bars at night, which have been bringing rock music to fans – boys and girls – for a long time. However, there are a lot of differences between the two. For example, in the underground rock scene, the music is usually hard and loud. Fans can often be seen getting into the pit, pogoing and moshing, and among these fans, there are usually more men than women. For people in the underground rock music scene, all of these are important factors that constitute their authentic identities, in which they usually tend to consider anything that is inconsistent with these as 'inauthentic'. This explains the tension between the underground and mainstream rock scene. Because in the mainstream rock scene where the fan base mainly constitutes of females, bands tend to make their music relatively softer in order to comfort to the audience, and it is more likely to see a sea of glow sticks instead of the mosh pits at the live performances.

Based on my own experience working as a live music event promoter in China, I found that what fangirls brought to the Chinese rock music scene were not only challenges to the gender status quo but also some delightful changes. Essentially, the idea that female fans are ruining the 'authenticity' of rock music is really about policing femininity out of the toxic masculinity that forms the image of rock. Therefore, instead of following the criticisms of 'fangirls in rock music', this article intends to focus on these changes, exploring how fangirls and their culture cooperate with the rock music industry and bring new life to today's Chinese rock music scene. By analyzing the case of emerging fangirl culture in the Chinese rock music scene, I will address how female fans

can act as active consumers and shape popular culture, as well as reveal how consumerism can affect the culture industry and cause cultural transformation.

1.1. Fangirls in the Chinese context

As the name suggests, the term ‘fangirls’, or “饭圈女孩” (*fanquan nühai*) in Chinese, usually refers to a specific group of fans which mainly constitutes of girls, especially those who are young. In the Chinese context, unlike young female fans in the general sense, this particular group of fans is originally closely related to the pop culture and idol industries. In China, ‘idol’ is an independent profession which is clearly distinguished from professional singers or actors. Compared with traditional actors, singers, or other celebrities, the so-called ‘idols’ in China usually are not required to have any superb skills other than the need to be proficient in providing fan services in order to actively establish and maintain imaginary intimate relationships with their fans (Gao et al., 2017). This means that it is acceptable if an idol is not good enough at singing, dancing, or acting; however, it would definitely be considered “unprofessional” if they fail to meet the expectations of their fans. According to the production system of the idol industry, every ‘idol product’ is created with a specifically assigned character to satisfy the fantasies of fans who are especially fascinated by this particular type of idol (Academy of Chinese Studies, 2019). In other words, what attracts fangirls the most may be the designed character or image of idol rather than their work itself.

In terms of paying less attention to the works of artists, fangirls may share some similarities with so-called ‘groupies’ in the rock music scene. However, unlike ‘groupies’ who always seek intimate, emotional, and/or sexual relationships with musicians in real life, fangirls usually maintain a one-way relationship with their idols, which means that this kind of ‘relationship’ often stays in their imagination rather than in reality (Gao, 2019). This type of relationship is only part of the rules in fangirl culture, and, in fact, they have many more rules that require members of the group to strictly follow. It is important to note, of course, that both ‘groupies’ and ‘fangirls’ are social constructions that involve negative stereotypes about femininity. While both groups tend to desire for relationships with rock stars, and the fascination with pop idols can happen to fans of any gender, for male fans, even if they have all these feelings and take further action, they will only be regarded as ‘regular’ fans. However, when it comes to female fans, especially in the rock

music scene, they will be labeled as a 'groupie' or 'fangirl', which implies a sense of 'inauthenticity', and is thus differentiated from 'fans' in the general sense. In other words, in the global music scene, maleness is constructed as the 'rightful' image of rock, and the behavior of male fans is normalized, rather than gendered. It is only the behavior of female fans that is gendered through negative connotations such as 'fangirl' and 'groupie'.

However, female fans in China who are fascinated by pop idols have actually embraced the title of 'fangirls' rather than getting rid of it. By identifying themselves as fangirls, this specific group of fans have created their own 'authentic' culture which includes a set of norms for behavior, language, organizational structure, etc., which allows them to distinguish themselves from any other types of fans. Taking organizational structure as an example, fangirl groups in China are usually well-organized. In order to support their common loved idols efficiently, they tend to develop a strict hierarchy and clear division of labor. For example, the leader of the fangirl group will be in charge of developing support strategies and detailed activity plans, while the fans in lower levels will work separately to help realize the plan. Some of the fangirls may specialize in taking pictures, some of them may focus on editing videos, and some may be responsible for voting, etc. By doing following this structure, their goal is to ensure that every single individual in the group can follow the 'common rules' and 'work' in an 'organized' way (Yang, 2020).

All these things mentioned above constitute the main difference between fangirls in China and other groups of female fans in general. Therefore, in this work, I use the term "fangirls" instead of "women/female fans" to distinguish the participation of these fans from the so-called "groupies" or any other type of female fans.

1.2. Chinese rock as special case

Originating from the West, Chinese rock, like other non-Western types of rock, inevitably faces the problem of being labelled as a copycat (Kloet, 2010). As reported in a special article on hip-hop in China in *Modern Sky Magazine*, "Compared to Western music, we will always be in a state of copying...We have all sorts of music, but none is properly digested by us" (Zhang, 2000: 19). In other words, globalization and copying actually play an important role in the Chinese rock music scene (Kloet, 2010). In this

case, some discussions about rock 'n' roll in the Western context, like the rock myth, can also be applied to the understanding of Chinese rock. However, it does not mean that we can simply take the western concept as a means explain the situation in China. When branching out beyond its origin in the West, rock always needs to be localized to survive (Baulch, 2003; Kloet, 2010), which requires consideration of different circumstances in different regions. In the case of China, there are two key factors: one is the historical-cultural environment of Chinese society, and another is the role of the state in China's popular culture industry (Huang, 2001; Jian, 2018; Kloet, 2010).

Therefore, this work draws on studies of rock in both western and non-western contexts, combined with a focus on the social, political, and cultural environments in China to discuss issues in the Chinese rock music scene, particularly issues related to gender and authenticity in the music fandom within the Chinese cultural context.

1.3. Methodology

Focusing on the impact of fangirls and their culture on the transformation of the Chinese rock music scene, this research adopts key methods of feminist cultural studies which tends to treat feminine audiences as active negotiators rather than passive recipients of cultural messages (Meagher, 2005) and pays more attention on the way that people participate in cultural activities in their daily lives. In using this approach to study the emerging fangirl culture in Chinese rock music scene, my aim is to investigate why and how female audiences can engage in the specific cultural scene of Chinese rock, generating meaning while consuming a more inclusive and evolving culture or rock music fandom.

As mentioned above, people's experience in their daily lives are one of the important points of this project. To better explore the experience of different types of female audiences in the Chinese rock music scene, I use data collected from a series of semi-structured interviews with five specific participants with different positions in the Chinese rock music scene.

Three of the five interviewees are female fans who have been passionate about rock music for about ten years or more and have also had some work experience as photographers or band managers, etc. in the Chinese rock music scene. All three of

these fans witnessed the changes in the Chinese rock music scene before and after the involvement of fangirl culture. Therefore, on one hand, knowing their experiences can be helpful to understand how women feel when being fans in the Chinese rock music scene, before and after Chinese rock being mainstream. On the other hand, the perceptions of these devoted female fans on another group of fans, who are also female but different from themselves, also provides useful information for understanding the phenomenon of the 'invasion' of fangirls in Chinese rock music scene.

The fourth person I chose to interview is also a big fan of rock music and has many years of experience being the manager of several well-known Chinese rock bands. He is also currently the owner of a newly established indie music label which aims to focus on the production of indie music idols. Considering the long-standing gap between the rock culture and idol industry, the idea of creating indie music idols is quite innovative but challenging as well. Through the interview with an experienced practitioner in the Chinese rock music scene, my aim is to learn how people in the rock industry think of the idol industry and its closely related fangirl culture over the years.

The fifth person I interviewed is someone who has been the owner of a live music venue in Beijing since 2010. This interviewee also has experience working as a band manager and a music events organizer for more than five years. The reason why I chose the owner of this venue as one of my interviewees is because a lot of the most popular bands in China today, including the top 5 ones in the first season of *the Big Band*, have all performed at this venue since when they were not as famous as they are now. Therefore, it can be said that he has witnessed the growth of many Chinese rock bands, as well as the changes brought about by the integration of fangirl culture on these bands and the live rock music scene. On the other hand, as the owner of a live music venue, his observation on how female fans are treated in the rock music scene is also worthy of attention.

Working as a live music events promoter at SCHOOL, one of the most famous live music venues in Beijing, since 2016, I have helped promote hundreds of rock shows. During that time, I have worked with a lot of practitioners in the Chinese rock industry, including rock musicians, rock bands' managers, rock photographers, etc. Meanwhile, I also met a lot of rock fans during my time working at live performances and have established good relationships with many of them. Therefore, I contacted all five of

interviewees listed above through my personal connections. Thanks to my own experiences, I have a good understanding of all my interviewees, and based on what I know about them, I believe that their views will be very helpful to this project. Luckily, all of them were happy to accept my interview offer, which allowed my research process to go smoothly.

In addition to my work experience in the Chinese rock industry, I am also a fan of an emerging Chinese idol group called R1SE. R1SE, an idol group composed of 11 young boys, made its debut in 2019, and I became a fan of them right after their debut. Although it has not been a long time since I started being their fan, I have joined several fan group chats on different social media platforms and have participated in many fangirl activities. For example, within a few months after their debut, I followed the instructions of some leaders in R1SE's fan base and used at least five different accounts every day to post posts with the names of group members on Weibo (one of the most important social media platforms in China, a microblogging site similar to Twitter and Facebook), to help increase the popularity of topics about these young idols on social media. In fact, there were many fangirls who did the same thing as I did at the same time. Many of us have not met each other, but we felt connected when 'working' together to support the idol who we all love. This experience allowed me to develop a better understanding of fangirls and fangirl culture. Combined with what I have learned from working in the Chinese rock industry, I realize that the emerging fangirl culture in the Chinese rock music scene is a topic worthy of further research – there are a lot of differences between the two, but there are also many things worth learning from each other.

Although I have been a member of the fangirl group for a while, due to the fact that the objects of our fandom are different, I am not very familiar with fangirls who are fascinated by rock band members. Therefore, to further explore the behavior of fangirls who are involved in the Chinese rock scene and people's perception of these fangirls, I conducted a discourse analysis through online media contents including social media posts, podcasts, etc. Most of the social media posts are from Weibo, because, based on my own experience, it is the most used social media platform for fangirls - they usually express their love for idols on this platform and use it as a tool to communicate with other fangirls. Through the posts on Weibo, we can see how these fangirls apply their 'authentic' culture to the rock music scene, thereby bringing changes to it. Other than the Weibo posts by fangirls, I also referred to some podcasts discussing the involvement of

fangirls in Chinese rock scene. As a supplement to the interview, analyzing these contents can help further understand the opinions on this phenomenon from people outside the fangirl circle.

Compared to some traditional qualitative approaches aimed at understanding or explaining the existing social reality, discourse analysis tends to focus more on the way in which ideas and phenomena were produced in the social world (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). In this project, by bringing in discourse analysis, I intend to further understand the construction of people's opinions on the phenomenon of the invasion of fangirls in the Chinese rock music scene.

1.4. Chapter Outline

In the chapter “Gendering popular music culture: the case of China”, I first reveal the global trend of gender construction in popular music, that is, rock is male, while pop is female. After that, I also explain how this trend is presented in the case of China, and thus leading to the absence of women or femininity in the Chinese rock music scene.

Next, In Chapter 3, I give a further explanation of the context of Chinese rock, especially answering the question of why Chinese rock has stayed underground or at least semi-underground for a long time. To address this problem, I first illustrate the interpretation of authenticity in the discourse of Chinese rock and then explore the influence of popular music censorship on Chinese rock. Here, I point out that from underground to semi-underground, Chinese rock has already begun to move upwards, which paved the way for it to go above-ground in the future.

Later, in Chapter 4, I follow the steps of Chinese rock moving upwards to tell the story of how Chinese rock has transitioned to the mainstream and interacts with fangirls who are usually associated with the mainstream pop music and pop culture. To set up the background for understanding fangirl culture in the Chinese context, I provide a brief explanation on the operating logic of the idol industry in China, which plays an important role in shaping Chinese fangirl culture. After that, I use some examples to illustrate how fangirls practice their authentic culture through participation in the rock music scene, thus challenging the existing construction of authenticity of Chinese rock.

To future explain how the involvement of fangirls has changed the Chinese rock music scene, in Chapter 5, I first review people's changes in attitude towards girls in the Chinese rock industry. Then, I use an example to illustrate how and why fangirls make efforts to get along with the Chinese rock scene. At the end of this chapter, I point out that the actions taken by both fangirls and people in the Chinese rock industry reflect the changing roles of female fans in the Chinese rock music scene. Through the participation of fangirls, we can see that females can also be the 'viewer' and 'proactive consumer' of 'men's bodies' instead of just being something that can only be attached to the men.

After reviewing the attempts of fangirls and the Chinese rock music scene to adapt to each other, I further discussed the cooperation between the two in Chapter 6, arguing that it can be seen as a process of worlding. In this process, Chinese rock is developing its own culture, which makes it unique to the global rock market and has the potential to be recognized by the world sooner or later.

In the concluding chapter, I argue that any one of any gender has every right to be a part in any type of music scene, and the acceptance of fangirls in the Chinese rock music scene provides us with a visible example. However, I also note that the negotiation between fangirls and the Chinese rock industry is still not fair enough at present. That being said, I believe that despite the purpose, the cooperation of fangirls and the Chinese rock music scene is a good start. With more and more shows and events continuously inviting fangirls into the Chinese rock scene, the relationship between will get better and better, and Chinese rock can finally find its own way to inhabit the global rock culture space in the future.

Chapter 2.

Gendering popular music culture: the case of China

As Andy Bennett (2000) suggested, popular music functions as a marker of identity, and thus, it is understandable that people may want their tastes to be validated by something more than just entertainment, and motivated by goals beyond profit (Behr, 2015). In the discourse of popular music, in order to create a specific sense of identity and a unique taste, there is a common trend to create a variety of standards to distinguish one music genre from the other. A typical example is rock music, which usually applies various criteria created by the music industry to emphasize its "authenticity" and "meaningfulness", thereby deliberately differentiating itself from the so-called 'pop' genre. This distinction is further gendered by constructing rock as a masculine genre and pop as feminine. This is exemplified by many public events. For example, in 2017, Bono from U2 made a statement in an interview with Rolling Stone, saying that rock has been ruined by too many girls and women getting involved in it (Wenner, 2017). Although he later apologized for his statement, the sentiment reflects global and mainstream ideas about gender and music fandoms.

In this chapter, I mainly focus on these gender norms constructed in popular music, revealing the long-existing gap between rock and pop, and examining how it has evolved in the context of Chinese society and culture.

2.1. Men's rock and Women's pop: a global trend

In the global context, many scholars have pointed out that rock is a very gendered type of music. (see Frith and McRobbie [1978] 1990, Hill, 2016; Larsen, 2017; Martin, 1995). To be more specific, it is a music genre with a strong sense of masculinity and has even become "synonymous with a male-defined sexuality" (Frith and McRobbie [1978] 1990, p.317). In contrast to rock, which is often overwhelmingly gendered as male, pop music are more likely to be gendered as female, and in many cases, it is not irrelevant with the actual gender identity of the performers or their fans (Warwick, 2015).

2.1.1. Rock and masculinity

For experienced rock fans, it is not difficult to feel the masculinity hidden in the rock culture, but it may take some effort to fully explain how these masculinities are reflected in detail. This is because the descriptive criteria we may use can be extremely diverse and complex, which requires us to consider different aspects when evaluating the gendered characters in rock.

There are many scholars, especially those in the West, who have interpreted the masculinity of rock and roll from different angles. First, in terms of style and form, rock music is often considered to be masculine and an expression of male sexuality (Frith and McRobbie [1978] 1990). Then, the participants in the rock industry, such as musicians, writers, producers, etc., are mostly men (ibid.). And even the fandom of rock is also considered to be male-dominated (Larsen, 2017) in which the practices of female fans are usually dismissed (Hill, 2016) or further sexualized as 'groupies' in the service of the male musicians. All these factors indicate that rock has long been constructed as a masculine culture. As Warwick (2015) suggested, in the rock world, "men, and white men in particular,...should be gazers rather than objects of the gaze" (p.333). In other words, for men who dominate the patriarchal rock world, they consider themselves to always be in the position of viewers of the female body, while women can only be treated as those being viewed. Therefore, when women attempt to change this situation and become viewers of the male body, or when rock music shows more femininity than masculinity, it threatens the patriarchy of rock. In this case, both females and femininity can be criticized as 'inauthentic' by those who consider masculinity as one of the important criteria of the authenticity of rock. And because of the construction of the close connection between femininity and pop music, they may also use phrases such as 'feels like pop' to express their dissatisfaction with the lack of masculinity.

2.1.2. Femininity and pop

Compared with rock culture that is usually considered tough and masculine, the image of pop music and pop culture seems to be constructed as much softer and more feminine. As suggested by Norma Coates (1997), reviewing the segregation of 'rock' and 'pop' we can find that the binary relationship between these two different genres of music actually reflects the opposition between 'authenticity' and 'artificiality'. According to

metonymic logic, so-called 'authenticity' can be synonymous with masculinity, while 'artificiality' stands for femininity. Therefore, the meaning of 'rock' is gradually accepted as 'male', and correspondingly, 'pop' is somehow naturalized as 'female'.

Just like how the masculinity of rock and roll can be evaluated from many different angles, the connection between pop music and femininity is also presented in various aspects. For example, in terms of theme, pop music usually seems more personal, and mainly focuses on "relationships and feelings" rather than "social justice and political change" (Warwick, 2015, p.339), which is opposite to what we know as 'authentic' rock. By analyzing the case of rock star Keith Richards and pop idol Madonna, Jacqueline Warwick (2015) further pointed out that the operating logic of stardom in pop culture also shows a strong sense of femininity. As compared to rock stars that usually represent rebelliousness, contempt for business and conventions, and obsession with art itself, pop idols do not necessarily have superb musical skills, instead it is essential for them to have the ability to "make a splash, and a sense of glamor" (p.343). Through efforts to make themselves more attractive and even become icons of pop trends and fashion, these pop stars have actually acquiesced to their position as a spectacle for people to watch. According to the construction of gender norms in the rock world mentioned above, women are usually in the position of being watched, which somehow explains the reason why pop music and pop stars are usually considered closely associated with femininity.

Through the above discussion on the femininity and pop culture, we can see that femininity here is actually a concept relative to the common-sense masculinity in rock culture. In this case, emphasizing the femininity of pop music seems to show another way to highlight the masculinity of rock so as to maintain the traditional construction of its authenticity. Just as Jody Rosen (2012) said in the analysis of an article using Justin Bieber as a target to satirize femininity and artificial characteristics of pop music, It "is just a sign of the times: In a pop-dominated music world, kicking sand in Justin Bieber's face is the only fun left for rock dead-enders" (para. 3).

2.2. The excluded femininity in the Chinese rock music scene

In order to understand the gender dimensions of the rock music fandom in China, we have to first understand the construction of gender across different cultural domains. As mentioned above, Chinese rock is somehow like a reproduction of rock in the Western context, and it retains the distinct characteristics of “masculinity”. According to Kloet (2010), “Chinese men are subjected to struggles with Western hegemonic masculinity” (p.104). In western society, a “real man” is usually considered to be someone who has “a body big, strong and muscular enough to consume alcohol, build houses and excel in sports” (Chow, 2008). However, for the mainstream pop music in China, there has been a dominant image of delicate, or even feminine, men, which seems to be contradictory to the discourse of the so-called “real man”, resulting in a “masculinity crisis” (Baranovitch, 2003). While the voice of rock can be read as an attempt to deal with this crisis of masculinity, it is “through rock that Chinese men and Chinese culture as a whole can regain their lost masculinity” (ibid.:119). This contradiction of what a ‘real man’ is illuminates the intersection between race and gender - namely, that dominant notions of masculinity are also of white, able-bodied masculinity.

Apparently, the traditional images of women in Chinese society are not conducive to the construction of this masculinity. For a long time, the most dominant female image in China has been constructed and represented as domesticated, gentle, sweet, and restrained (Baranovitch, 2003). In Chinese popular music in particular, all these constructions of the role of women are further highlighted, and sometimes women may even be portrayed as men’ sex objects, thus reflecting the widespread belief in Chinese society that “women exist for men” (ibid.). All the stereotypes listed above contribute to the idea of objectifying women – of women being treated just as a body that is primarily used for male consumption, and that women should restrain themselves and not show their desire for men. The existence of such an idea is actually a result of the patriarchal gender hierarchy. It is not unique to China, but a global situation. As suggested by Jack Halberstam (2012), “we live in a world that still controls girls and girl sexualities within a rigid system of blocks, taboos, and prohibitions” (p.9). According to the “normalized” notions of masculinity and femininity in the global context, men should be the ones who actively strive for a woman’s attention, while women can only passively wait to be

pursued by men (ibid.). Such a viewpoint can apply to any general situation, but is even more true in the male-dominated rock scene. This, therefore, explains the usually disadvantaged position of women in the rock scene – they can only be objects of viewing, not viewers. In the case of Chinese rock, such an inferior position for women can be further embodied as the absence of femininity.

Despite the participation of female musicians and female fans, in most cases, 'femininity' is still excluded from the Chinese rock music scene. In the discussion of Chinese rock music and the post-revolutionary search for masculinity, Baranovitch (2003) used the bands Tian Tianshuo, Cui Jian, and Tang Dynasty as examples to demonstrate the abundant attempts to define and assert masculinity in Chinese rock. He pointed out a phenomenon in Chinese rock in which the expressions in these music works are not stated to be gender-specific, it indeed delivered a strong male-centric attitude between the lines. It seems that "it is only men who are expected to demonstrate their desire and power, and that desire and power are the criteria for masculinity, as if women did not share these qualities" (Baranovitch, 2003: 117).

Due to this sexism in the Chinese rock music scene, women were often accused to be inauthentic when they tried to participate. In this case, for female rockers, their female gender is usually used as a selling point, but prevents them from being accepted as "real" rock stars. Taking the example of Luo Qi, Kloet (2010) explained another reality in China: if a girl tried to act like a male rocker - taking drugs, drinking a lot, and sleeping around - she would suffer more condemnations than a man. As for a male rocker it "is just another indicator of being tough and cool, whereas for a girl it is a source of disapproval" (Kloet, 2010, p.111). By challenging the masculinity of rock, bad girls who "did the things Chinese girls are not supposed to do" are marginalized by both the mainstream society and the rock culture in which only boys may be naughty (Kloet, 2010: 113). In summary, here we have culturally specific, but simultaneously global, patterns of gender construction for femininity and masculinity, and a double standard when it comes to expression, desire, and fandom.

All the things listed above have resulted in the underground Chinese rock music scene's rejection of mainstream pop music, which represents femininity, and its female-dominated fan base. However, in the Chinese context, the conflict between 'underground' rock and the so-called mainstream is not limited to gender issues. In the

next chapter, I will expand on the context of 'underground' Chinese rock and further explain how its interpretation of "authenticity" can be connected to global discussions, as well as how this concept of authenticity contributes to the widening gap between the Chinese rock and the mainstream stage.

Chapter 3.

Understanding ‘underground’ Chinese rock

Before *The Big Band*, a reality show about bands in China, became popular in recent years, and despite the pursuit of wider recognition and profit, Chinese rock has long remained underground or at least semi-underground. However, such a result is not completely due to the active choice of Chinese rockers - although, sometimes, they may do it on purpose to highlight their authenticity. Rather, it is kind of like a compelling choice for their survival in the face of strict censorship.

In this chapter, I examine two possible reasons why rock music has long existed as a relatively underground music genre in China: one is the interpretation of "authenticity", and the other is the censorship of popular music by authorities. An important difference between the two is that the former may constitute a more subjective internal motivation for people to keep stay underground, while the latter may be considered as some external pressure that makes 'being underground' relatively more like a passive choice.

3.1. Interpretation of authenticity and Chinese rock

The concept of "authenticity" (together with "identity") has long been a focal point in the discourse of popular music (Frith, 2004). According to the OED definition, when something is described to be 'authentic', it usually suggests that it is 'reliable' or 'trustworthy'. In the global context of rock, the meaning of 'authenticity' is often defined as opposed to "faking it" (Barker & Taylor, 2007), or "artificiality" (Weisethaunet & Lindberg, 2010). Whether or not something has authenticity seems to have become a key point to distinguish between rock and pop – people in the rock scene are always trying their best to eliminate the traces of 'artificialness' and develop their authentic identities, while pop music, which is created as an assembly-line-style product of the music industry, seems to have naturally embraced the 'artificiality'. However, it should be noted that "authenticity is not inherent in the object or event that is designated authentic but is a socially agreed-upon construct" (McLeod, 1999). In other words, rock music is not born with authenticity, and likewise, pop music is not born to be inauthentic. It is just

that criteria such as whether it "shows artificiality" has been created by society, giving different music genres differences in "authenticity". At the same time, it is because the concept of authenticity is constructed, that its connotation can be ever-changing in different eras and different regions.

As a product originating from the West, rock music and its construction of authenticity in the Western context has a large influence worldwide. In the global context, there have been many discussions about the authenticity of rock music among scholars (especially those from the West). As discussed in Chapter 2, masculinity has been constructed globally as one of the key points in representing the authenticity of rock music. In addition, in the early rock criticisms, authorship was also regarded as an important criterion for the evaluation of authenticity, stating that rock does not belong in "folklore" or "entertainment", but in "art", and thus it must have good performance in "songwriting qualities" (Weisethaunet & Lindberg, 2010, p.471). Therefore, 'authentic rock' is usually considered "transgressive and meaningful", while inauthentic rock (or "pop") may often be described as "co-opted and superficial" (Kloet, 2010, p.26). Weisethaunet & Lindberg (2010) also argued that, the notion of authenticity can refer to a sense of "refusal" or "purity", that is somehow a kind of artistic independence. In this case, 'authenticity' is defined by comparing it against that which it thinks it is not (for example, standardization), therefore, portraying artists as rebels against these 'inauthentic' items can also contribute to the contraction and maintenance of the authenticity of rock (Reynolds & Press, 1995).

In terms of Chinese rock, as an imported product, it has inherited elements from Western rock in many ways, including its interpretation of authenticity. For example, as listed above, a strong sense of masculinity, the relatively high artistic quality, and the rebellious image of the artist, etc. All of these things have pointed rock to the opposite of pop. Therefore, it is can be understood that many Chinese rock musicians insist on staying underground and keeping a distance from the mainstream to maintain their 'authentic' identity.

However, although it is consistent with the authenticity of rock in the Western context in many aspects, there are still some differences in the interpretation of authenticity between Chinese and Western rock. For example, as Chinese rock is somehow borrowed from Western rock, whether it is 'like the West' has become a

criterion for judging its "authenticity" (Kloet, 2010). Although there are musicians who tried to use the sound of Chinese instruments, like Erhu or Guzheng to show 'Chineseness' in the music, I do not think it can help establish the unique culture and authenticity of Chinese rock, a point in which I will provide further details on later. In addition, the Chinese government's strict censorship on popular music has complicated the issue of authenticity, especially in the expression of rebelliousness. In the next section, I will focus on the influence of the censorship on Chinese rock and explore how rock musicians in China can express their rebellious attitudes in an alternative way.

3.2. Struggle to survive: The oblique resistance of 'underground' Chinese rock

In a study of the popular music scene in contemporary China, Nimrod Baranovitch (2003) mentioned that, for rockers in China, the rebellious attitudes to the state are often intimately linked to the maintenance of masculinity. Therefore, Chinese rock and roll, music that is usually described as 'real' or 'authentic', is often highly political. However, in the face of strict censorship by the state, it is this political feature that brings a lot of difficulties for Chinese rock's in survival.

"[rock music's] relationship with the central government of mainland China has always been equivocal" (Huang, 2003). In the discussion of the censorship of popular music in China, Jeroen de Kloet (2010), a scholar from Amsterdam University, pointed out that Chinese authorities considered that popular music, in particular rock, is dangerous and may disturb the harmony which is crucial for society. And thus, they have tried their best to censor this kind of music strictly. As a result, in the Chinese popular music scene, "any wording related to political / sexual suggestion / obscene / barbaric fantasy" (Kloet, 2010: 181) and "any sexual content, or anti-China, anti-government content" (Kloet, 2010: 183) is stringently prohibited.

For those who tend to identify themselves as 'real' rockers in China, they often need to show a rebellious attitude to prove their authenticity. In this case, such a policy is obviously not conducive to their survival. For example, at the end of the 1980s, Cui Jian, a Chinese musician who is well-known as the 'founder of Chinese rock' was silenced because the words he used in some of his publicly released musical works, like 'New Long March' (which is considered to be a mockery of Mao's 'Long March' of the

1930s), were seen as a kind of political rebellion that provoked the Chinese government (Knight, 2015). The silencing of Cui Jian and other similar examples have made many rebellious rock lovers choose to stay underground and no longer express their political or rock ethos in public. These 'underground' Chinese rockers usually tend to be active in a limited circle, and only exchange ideas with people who share the same rock spirit as themselves, as it seems to be the most feasible way to help them avoid as much as possible the risk of being censored.

However, since 2000, with the emergence of various music festivals such as Midi Music Festival and Modern Sky Music Festival (later renamed as Strawberry Music Festival) in China, Chinese rock bands have also been given more opportunities to perform in public. Meaning that rock music has become something that can bring these bands more profit and not just self-entertainment. In this case, many of rock musicians in China prefer their music to be recognized within a broader and more universal context rather than being identified as political dissenters (Baranovitch, 2003: 245) and being banned from performing publicly. But, pursuing wider recognition does not mean that they would like to give up resistance, rather, they adopted a more subtle way, which is, according to Miaoju Jian (2018), using the strategy of "oblique resistance" to make their political expression. For example, in the song 'Speaking Wounds', a relatively young Chinese rock band P.K. 14 from Nanjing, China, used relatively obscure words in their lyrics to insinuate the Tiananmen Square crackdown of 1989: "When the bombing began, ran outside and realized that the time has passed. At every street end, is weeping shadows and loud shouting (在轰炸开始的时候, 跑到外面发现时间已经过了很久。在所有的街道的尽头, 都有哭泣的影子以及大声地喊叫)" (P.K.14, 2004). In the lyrics there is not even a that word clearly directs to the event, but it can evoke Chinese audiences' painful memories of the government's bloodshed and repression. For Chinese rock bands like P.K., adopting the strategy of "oblique resistance" may make them "highly esteemed" in the local indie scene, but it cannot change the fact that they are "still relatively unknown to the wider Chinese public" (Jian, 2018, p.230). In other words, facing of the pressure of censorship, if these bands do not give up expressing their resistance ethos (whether overtly or obliquely), they still have to continue to stay underground or, at least, semi-underground, instead of becoming mainstream for the general public.

As explained above, the strategy of “oblique resistance” actually reflects Chinese rockers’ struggle to survive in a highly repressive political atmosphere. By adopting this strategy, rock musicians can reach a wider audience, but still maintain their rebellious attitudes. At the same time, as explained in Chapter 2, the political themes in their music also helps them show the masculinity of rock. As a result, although these rock musicians have tried to open themselves to a wider audience, they still kept a certain distance from pop music and female fans who often appear in the mainstream pop music scene, but the distance here is obviously smaller than before. Hence, I argue that the adoption of the “oblique resistance” strategy has allowed Chinese rock music to move up from underground to semi-underground, through which we can see that although the tension between rock and pop is still there, it has begun to get loosen up. With the spread of consumerism in China, this trend has inevitably continued. Later, in 2019, as *The Big Band*, a variety show of bands in China, was broadcasted to the general public, some underground or semi-underground bands were pushed to move above ground. In the next chapter, I will further explore this upward journey of Chinese rock and tell the story about its interactions with fangirls who are usually considered to be associated with mainstream pop.

Chapter 4.

Going Mainstream: the interactions between fangirls and the Chinese rock music scene

Although there has been a long-standing gap between rock and pop, this does not mean that the situation will never change. With the development of the economy and technology, the production, consumption, and distribution of music (including rock, pop, and various genres) has been changing, which has also made the boundaries between "authentic" and "artificial", "rock" and "pop" become increasingly blurred. In this changing process, rock music can go up to the mainstream and reach more audiences, however, these new audiences may "authenticate music on different grounds" (Weisethaunet & Lindberg, 2010), and challenge the current definition of authenticity.

Taking the Chinese rock music scene as an example, the latest blurring of its boundaries with the mainstream pop music scene happened in the summer of 2019 when *The Big Band*, a musical reality show featuring 31 Chinese bands of different sub-genres of rock, was first released to the public and quickly became a big hit among Chinese audiences. In order to make the show more attractive to the general public, all the musicians engaged in that program were repacked as idols, wearing exquisite costumes and telling well-designed stories in front of the camera.

In the transformation from the relatively underground rock stars to the more mainstream idols, many of these artists were required to show less roughness and rebellion (which were seen as important representations of authentic rock) and instead, establish a more 'positive' image. Otherwise, according to the restrictions of the Chinese National Radio and Television Administration (Sina Entertainment, 2018), they would not be able to appear in any publicly released TV programs. Therefore, we can see that many of these rock musicians in the show removed their piercings, covered their tattoos, and even modified some of their lyrics. For example, in the song "Blue Daydreaming (白日梦蓝)" by The Hedgehog (刺猬乐队), a line in the lyrics originally says, "Society is a hurtful game (社会是伤害的比赛)" (The Hedgehog, 2009). However, perhaps because this sentence sounds like an insinuation to Chinese society, when performing in the reality show, they changed the line to "The world is a hurtful game (世间是伤害的比赛)"

(The Big Band, 2019). By Changing the word “society” to “world”, the political meaning in the lyrics is reduced, but at the same time its authenticity is also weakened.

Although practices like the above may make these rock musicians seem less ‘authentic’, it does not affect the fact that audiences in front of the screen are attracted by them and may even become their fans. For many audiences of this reality show, rock is not something they are familiar with, not to mention the authenticity of rock music, as it is something that they neither understand nor care about. For these audiences, the reason why they may like a certain band can be very simple. It may be because they think the songs are catchy, or it may even have nothing to do with the music, but rather just because a certain band member looks great. This is the typical logic of pop idols’ fandom. In fact, many of the audience who became fans of these bands after watching *The Big Band* were indeed young female fans who were usually obsessed with pop idols. As a result, thanks to the repackaging of rock musicians in the show, a large number of fangirls were attracted by these idol-liked rock stars, indicating the beginning of the interaction between fangirls and the Chinese rock music scene.

4.1. Fangirls and the idol industry in China

In China, not all young female fans may be called ‘fangirls’, and all the members in the ‘fangirl’ group are necessarily girls. In the Chinese context, the term ‘fangirls’ usually refers to a specific group fans (including both male and female fans) who regard their fandom as a career and always try their best to create better data performance for their beloved idols (Ju, 2019; WoLeShuoLiShi, 2020). But what is data performance? Why do fangirls need to work hard to boost this performance to support their idols? To answer these questions, we need to further explore the operating logic of the Chinese idol industry.

With the increasing development of digital platforms, social media, and smartphones, according to Qian Zhang & Keith Negus (2020), in China, the various data (including statistical, sonic, and semantic) collected by and reported on digital platforms and social media seem to have become a key metric for the popularity of performers, especially applying to pop idols. Because, as discussed in Chapter 2, it is more essential for pop idols to have the ability to attract people than to have superb musical skills. Therefore, if a pop idol does not have good data performance, it may indicate that

he/she is less popular, less successful, or even less professional compared to those that do. In this case, we can see that the careers of those pop idols are closely bonded to their data performance, and in order to help these idols to get more visibility and success, their fans, that is, fangirls in the Chinese context, will actively engage in strategic online activities to feed the algorithms of digital or social media platforms and complete their intervention in data collection and reporting. For example, Weibo, the largest microblogging site as well as a major online channel for entertainment media contents in China, has created a Celebrity Chart that serves as an indicator of popularity and influence of entertainment stars. According to the 'game rules' of the Weibo Celebrity Chart, fans can "go to their idols' profiles and read the latest posts within 30 days and repost them everyday" to boost "the numbers of views for their idols' Weibo accounts" (Hou, 2019), and thus enhance their idols' rank on the Chart. According to the rules of the Chinese idol industry, idols that rank higher on various charts seem to be more popular and influential, and as a result, will get more performance and business cooperation opportunities. Here, fangirls' efforts in generating data plays an important role in the development of their supported idols' careers. For idols in China, data means money and fame, and through the practice of helping the idols they support to create better data performance, these fangirls actions can not only benefit their idols but also "enhance their sense of achievement and agency" (Zhang & Negus, 2020, p.494).

In fact, the competition of data performance among Chinese idols is very complicated. Helping an idol win the top position in all aspects, often requires fangirls to act collectively - developing strategic plans, carrying out division of labor, and investing a lot of time and resources. Thus, in order to arrange collective actions more conveniently, fangirls spontaneously form their own organizations called 'supporting club (后援会)'. These are kind of like 'fan clubs' in the Western context, but is different in that 'supporting clubs' are more for a way of organizing public activities to clearly show the support for idols, rather than just a means of communication among fans themselves or between fans and celebrities. As explained in the introduction, based on my own observation as a fangirl, there is usually a strict hierarchy and clear division of labor within the "support clubs". Fangirls in those clubs also create their own ways of expressing support to differentiate themselves from others who do not belong to their group. By doing so, these fangirls have actually established their own authentic identities and structure, and have also brought these into their practice in the Chinese rock scene.

4.2. Practices of fangirls in the Chinese rock music scene

Due to the different understanding of authenticity, the practice of fangirls participating in the Chinese rock scene is also different from that of rock fans in the general sense.

For example, compared with rock fans who usually pay more attention to the quality of the music itself, many fangirls may be obsessed with a particular rock musician or rock band only because of their appearance and not because of their music. Therefore, these fangirls may not hesitate to praise their idol's good-looking appearance on any occasion.

In a podcast discussing the topic of the emerging fangirls in the Chinese rock music scene, Fang Zhou (a big fan of Chinese rock who is also a host of the music radio EZFM and holds a master's degree in popular music studies from the University of Liverpool) said that based on his own observation in one of the WeChat chatting groups created by fans of Click#15 (a Chinese funk band founded by Ricky and Yang Ce, who won the fourth place in the first season of *The Big Band*), fangirls who are fascinated by rock stars can be roughly divided into three types, one of which tends to say something like "Ricky is so handsome" or "Yang Ce is so handsome" almost every day (Music ONLY Podcast, 2019). When searching for the names of band members on Weibo, you can also see a lot of posts like "XX is handsome" and "XX is my boyfriend". For fangirls, such behavior is in line with their own definition of authenticity, because by sparing no efforts to express praise and love to their idols, they can establish and maintain the imagined intimacy with their idols. However, it is contrary to the traditional interpretation of authenticity in the rock scene. On the one hand, these fangirls skip over the quality of the content and just focuses on the appearance of the artist instead, thus somehow turning rock into a cultural product as superficial as pop. On the other hand, fangirls' practice of publicly commenting on the appearance of rock musicians (most of them are men) seems to challenge men's position as 'gazers' in the rock scene, as these fangirls, as the representations of female, begin to become 'viewers' and 'consumers' of male rockers' bodies, thus getting rid of the previous position of women 'being watched'.

One of the other kinds of fangirls mentioned by Fang Zhou also challenges the previous construction of rock's authenticity to some extent. This type of fangirl may ask

in the fans' chatting group for information such as how to buy tickets for a certain rock show. Here, I need to clarify that behavior itself will not pose any threat to those who think they have authenticity in the rock music scene, but the words used by these fangirls in expressing their questions do conflict with authenticity in the minds of many rock fans. For example, they may use some words like "Mengxin (萌新, means lovely newbie)", "DouDou (抖抖, can be translated as 'shaking shaking', expressing 'I'm nervous' but in a cute way), or "bdjw (an abbreviation of *bu dong jiu wen* (不懂就问), meaning 'I do not know about it, so I just ask)" - these, as mentioned earlier, are fangirls' own unique language. Looking at the first two examples, we can find that fangirls created such words to express the cuteness of fan girls, thus demonstrating a sense of femininity; while the latter example seems like a tool for fan girls to distinguish themselves from others, because except members of the fangirl group, few people may use such abbreviations in their daily lives. Therefore, this use of language can be seen as a unique symbol of fangirls, and for experienced rock fans, it can be translated into the symbol of pop culture and 'inauthenticity'.

According to Fang Zhou's statement, there is another typical type of fangirl called 'CP fans (CP 粉, means fans of the couple)'. In Chinese fangirl culture, the term 'CP fans' usually refers to fangirls who are particularly fascinated by the relationships between two specific idols (they can be of different genders or the same gender), while most of these relationships only reflect the fantasies of fangirls. Again, taking the fangirls of Click #15 as an example, as Fang Zhou suggested, some of these fangirls may say something like "these two guys are matching so well!" "Yang is so adorable! Ricky really looks like Yang's boyfriend!" "I really look forward to seeing them develop a real relationship!" etc. (Music ONLY Podcast, 2019). Though the practice of 'CP fans', we can see that these fangirls not only challenge men's position as "gazers" in the rock music scene, but also challenge the heteronormativity (e.g. Frith and McRobbie, 1990 [1978]) embedded in the patriarchal rock world.

In addition to the activities listed above, fangirls also create Super Topics on Weibo for the bands or band members they support. Although they do not organize crazy data-generating activities (which is a result of negotiations between fangirls and the authentic rock culture, which I will explain it in the later chapter), these rock stars were still pushed into the data competition on social media platforms like Weibo. At the

time of writing this paper, the second season of The Big Band is currently on the air, and there are another 31 Chinese rock bands who have started their trip up above ground. By participating in the program, they will inevitably be reshaped into pop idols, interact with fangirls, and lose some authenticity. However, they still choose to do so. Therefore, in the next Chapter, I will focus on this issue, exploring how and why rock musicians in China are embracing the influence of fangirls, and then further explain how the roles of female fans changed in the Chinese rock music scene before and after the involvement of fangirls.

Chapter 5.

The changing roles of female fans and the changing face of the Chinese rock music scene

As previously discussed, while participating in the Chinese rock music scene, fangirls have brought in their own authenticity culture, which poses a challenge to the authentic rock culture. But what do people in these rock music scenes think of these fangirls? Are these fangirls treated differently from other female rock fans? Next, I will try to answer these questions based on and my own experience and interviews with several practitioners in the Chinese rock industry.

5.1. "We don't have the fashion you are hunting for, we are only here for your cash"

According to the construction of authenticity of Chinese rock, fangirls and their representative pop culture and idol industry have long been the subjects of despise by many Chinese rock fans. Therefore, when they first entered the Chinese rock scene, they received a lot of negative comments, especially from rock fans. For example, we can easily find posts on the most popular social media platforms like Weibo and Douban, saying that fangirls are "notorious" and should "keep away from the rock music scene". Through interviews, I found that the people in the rock music scene did not welcome fangirls very much at first, or at least many of them have somehow felt 'uncomfortable' because of the involvement of fangirls.

There may be various reasons for this 'uncomfortable' feeling. For example, one of the female rock fans I interviewed said,

"Many fan girls don't really like rock music at all and even don't want to know anything more about it. For these fangirls, rock music is only something that is in trend, and it is not much different from those popular restaurants, clothes, etc. Therefore, as you can see, they come to the show only to keep up with the trend - they swarmed into the live rock music venue, took a lot of photos for social media posts and then just left. Many of them have never

even finished listening a song, that is weird." (personal communication, June 12, 2020)

One of my other interviewees expressed his incomprehension of other behaviors of fangirls, such as waving glow sticks or light signs with bands' or band members names at a rock show.

"One day when I entered the bar (the live rock venue), seeing a lot of girls with glow sticks and light signs in their hands, I even thought I went to the wrong place concert and entered a pop concert for one second." (personal communication, June 28, 2020)

All these statements have actually pointed to the criticism of fangirls' as 'inauthentic'. In this case, such criticisms can be blamed on the stereotypes of rock fans. But in other cases, some of the improper behavior of fangirls are indeed offensive and have directly caused some dissatisfaction among rock fans. Almost all of my interviewees reported that some fangirls may use aggressive language to slander rock musicians they don't like on social media, and sometimes they may also post candid photos to support their comments, actions which my interviewees deemed as "annoying".

For example, in 2019, Zhang Zhexuan, the lead singer of Chinese band Penicillin had a dispute with Carl Barat from the Libertine in a bar in Beijing. The cause of this incident was that Carl's management team did not book the venue, but, at the same time, did not allow Zhang to enter -which is unreasonable, thus provoking Zhang, especially when he had already had a few bottles of beer to drink. As a result, Zhang yelled at Carl and his team, and said arrogant somethings like "I want to kill him, I want to kill them all" and "The tickets I have sold in Chinese market are almost four times that of Carl, do you know how much I have contributed to the sales of this bar, and why are you not allowing me to enter my place?" etc. (Yang, 2019). For rock fans like myself, it was really not a big deal, because we can see similar quarrels after a couple drinks almost every day. In the case of Zhang and Carl, they did not take it as a big deal either, and a short while after the fight, they met up with each other and had a delightful chat that night. However, some fangirls of Carl witnessed the whole quarrel (not including what happened after that), took videos, and posted them online. By making these videos

public, these fangirls successfully turned Zhang into a target for them to attack – they tried everything possible to discredit him, calling him a ‘fucking idiot’, accusing him of plagiarizing Oasis, etc. Almost all Chinese bands have more or less imitated certain western bands, and almost every drunk rock musician has had a dispute with others, but the reason why Zhang became a target is because he offended Carl Barat, who is called a ‘goddess’ by some fangirls in China. In fact, this type of online slander is a part of the fangirl culture in China – if anyone does something unfavorable to their idols, these fangirls will unite to fight back. While this may seem like a type of revenge, for fangirls, it is their own way of supporting and protecting their idols.

Although fangirls may have aroused the resentment of rock fans in various aspects, practitioners in the Chinese rock scene seem to be gradually opening their arms to these fangirls, because these fangirls who are willing to dedicate almost everything to their idols can definitely bring more benefits to rock musicians or even the whole rock music scene.

With more and more fangirls coming to the shows, taking photos and posting them online, it's like a free promotion for a lot of rock music venues and rock bands. Through the photos and comments posted by fangirls, more and more people get the chance to know these venues and bands that were previously not very famous to the public. After getting to know the venues and bands, they may choose to come to a rock show to catch up with the trend, and thus bring profits to the venues and artists. As rock gradually becomes a type of ‘fashion’ for the general public, people of different professions who work in the rock industries can all benefit more or less from it. For example, with more and more rock events held to feed the increasing number of audiences, not only are the venue owners and performing bands benefitting from the tickets revenues, but live music photographers, rock event poster designers and live music promoters like myself can also get more opportunities to work, and thus to earn more wages.

There are even some bands who would like to perform to comfort to the fangirls’ desires. For example, according to one of my interviewees who is the founder of an indie music label as well as the band manager of several popular rock bands in China, rock stars can also be managed in the same way as the training of idols:

“Just like the idol industry, we also care about the design and management of rock star characters. Taking The Penicillin as an example, I did tell them to perform like they do have some affairs with each other (of course, they don't), because their fans love to see that, and they will pay for it.” (personal conversation, July 10, 2020)

While, when asked what he thought of the fangirls who participated in the rock music scene, he said, “I have no opinion, as long as they don't make trouble” (personal conversation, July 10, 2020).

It seems that practitioners in the Chinese rock industry may choose to cater to fangirls; however, they still treat these fangirls unfairly. Just as Chinese punk band Joyside said in a poster of a 2004 performance: “We don't have the fashion you are hunting for, we are only here for your cash” (Sina Entertainment, 2004) – this is exactly the current attitude towards fangirls of Chinese rock industry holds.

5.2. Fangirls' efforts to get along with the rock scene

While the rock industry in China is trying to accept and cooperate with the emerging fangirls and fangirl culture for more benefits, fangirls are also making efforts to get along with the rock music scene. For instance, they may try to follow the rules created by 'authentic' rock music fans to make their idols seem more authentic. However, it should be noted that the reason why fangirls make these efforts is not because they believe that these rules have an unchangeable dominance in the rock music scene, or that they think they have to follow the roles to fit into the rock scene. Instead, they do it because in their own culture, the duty of fangirls is to support their idols, and so, they do not want their idols to feel uncomfortable or be blamed for the 'inappropriate' behaviors of their fans. We can find such fangirl's attempts to fit in through some of their social media posts. For example, there is a post on Weibo saying:

“Let me clarify something. Yang is a band member rather than an idol. Please don't support him according to the culture and tradition of fangirls. This fan page is not like an idol's fan club. The aim of this page is simply to let Yang's fans gather together - loving him, protecting him and finding his shining points. Maybe you like his cuteness.

Maybe you like his charm when playing the drums. But Anyway, PLEASE respect the culture of rock music!” (Sina Weibo, 2020)

The publisher of this post called is 盘尼西林鼓手小羊全球姐姐团 (*Pannixilin gushou xiaoyang quanqiu jiejie tuan*, meaning Penicillin’s drummer Xiao Yang’s global sister group), The account is run by a sort of leader of the fangirl group of Yang Yuhao, the drummer of the band Penicillin. The post was published in June 2020 when a new reality show featured the rock band Penicillin and other idol groups such as R1SE, Rocket Girls 101, etc. was just aired and attracted more fangirls to fancy the band, especially the youngest band member Yang. Many of these newly joined fangirls were fans of the other idols groups. Therefore, they may only know how to support their favorite stars in the typical way of supporting idols, which made some people feel that Penicillin is more like an ‘idol group (or idol band)’ rather than a ‘rock band’, which also made the band members of Penicillin feel a bit uncomfortable. So, the leader of this fangirl group wrote this post, aiming to call on other fangirls to regulate their behavior to make the one they like feel comfortable. As mentioned above, the strict hierarchy is an important part of Chinese fangirl culture. According to this hierarchal structure, the fans with lower levels in the fangirl group will strictly follow what their leader says. From this post, we can see how the difference between ‘idols’ and ‘rock stars’ is highlighted. These fangirls noticed that the object of their fandom is definitely different from ‘pop idols’, at least according to the band members themselves. Therefore, as fangirls, they should respect the wishes of their idols, and thus regulate their own behaviors to show “respect” to the rock culture. Through these efforts, fangirls do not intend to satisfy those who think they have more authenticity in the rock music scene, but instead want to satisfy the one they love.

5.3. From groupies to fangirls

Although it is regarded as a legitimate tool for rock musicians to make themselves look more mainstream and earn more money and fame, the practice of fangirls still changes the role of female fans in the Chinese rock music scene.

“It was about 10 years ago, when I was still in college, you could see that many girls at the rock events were so-called Guoer (果儿, meaning “groupie”). Their purpose for coming to a rock show was very simple and

straightforward, which was nothing more than wanting to find a cool boy to sleep with, or to find a boyfriend and so on. At that time, we could hardly hear any criticism of these girls. People thought these girls were 'real punk', and they themselves felt the same way." (personal conversation, July 23, 2020)

This is the real experience of a female fan of Chinese rock, although she may never define herself as a groupie, because, according to her,

"When it was very popular to be a groupie in the rock music scene, I was studying in Nanjing where there were few rock events at that time. So, you know, I couldn't even see a rock show, and how could I become a Gouer, right? But, I know these because I have a lot of friends who once called themselves Gouer and were very popular in Beijing's underground rock scene at that time." (personal conversation, July 23, 2020)

Through these descriptions, we can find that in the 2000s, rock music and rock culture were still not very popular in China, and in the existing rock scenes at that time, it seemed normal for female fans to be groupies. In this case, female fans were discriminated as the objects of a man's sexual desire. Although some of the groupie girls may argue that they chose who they have a relationship with, it cannot change the fact that the name 'groupie' has reflects the discrimination of female fans, which suggests that female are only people that can bring sexual benefits to the always male-dominated rock scene. Therefore, as in the global discourse of rock, it can be said that female fans who defined themselves or were defined by others as 'groupies' only played the roles of the 'objects of male gaze' in the early rock music scene in China.

However, after fangirls appeared in the rock scene, the situation has slightly changed. Although the name 'fangirl', like the term 'groupie', also has some negative gender connotations, satirizing the superficiality of female fans in the rock music scene, these girls are no longer treated as objects that can only satisfy the sexual desires of men. Instead, as discussed above, these fangirls brought their own authenticity into the Chinese rock scene, redefining what kind of rock stars female fans like and how they express their love for the rock stars they support. In order to comfort to the fangirls who usually have strong purchasing power and are willing to promote their idols voluntarily,

many male rock stars began to perform according to the preferences of these fans. Here, fangirls seem to have become the active consumers of the male rock stars. Unlike the groupies in the early Chinese rock scene who thought of themselves as active, these fangirls have actually made the male musicians and even the male-dominated Chinese rock industry make changes for them. By inflicting an actual influence on the Chinese rock scene, fangirls have challenged the stereotype that 'females can only be the object of male gaze' and shifted their position to the "viewers" of men.

In addition, as consumers, these fangirls also show more initiative than previous female fans in the Chinese rock scene. Because, as the examples in the previous two sections show, every move of these fan girls may affect people's comments on their favorite rock stars, and the time, money, and effort they put in to supporting 'idols' can bring more benefits to the rock industry. This can be seen as a sign suggesting that female fans are changing from passive consumers to more proactive ones.

Chapter 6.

Cooperation Between fangirls and Chinese rock: a worlding process

Reviewing the efforts made by fangirls and the Chinese rock music scene to adapt to each other, as well as changing roles of female fans in the Chinese rock music scene, we can see that Chinese rock seems to be creating its own characteristics. This characteristics are not as simple as using some sonic elements of Chinese instruments, nor is it just copying a Chinese version of Western rock. Instead, it can be seen as an attempt to make Chinese rock an independent catalogue and create its own culture. Therefore, I would like to regard the process of fangirls and the Chinese rock music scene cooperating with each other as a worlding process.

As according to Aihwa Ong (2011), the process 'worlding' can be seen as the ongoing "art of being global" (p.3), and is also a process about learning to feel comfortable in inhabiting this global space. Especially for cities in Asia, Ong (2011) further explained that it is not about "simply turning to Western prototypes", but rather about "developing from homegrown solutions to Asian metropolitan challenges, distinctive urban profiles, political styles, and aesthetic forms" to "participate in a bigger game of winning some kind of world recognition"(p.13).

In terms of Chinese rock, which was originally created by imitating Western models, it is not enough to inhabit the global sphere and gain global recognition by relying on copying sonic and cultural elements of Western rock. It thus required for Chinese rock to work more on developing 'Chineseness'. As Jeroen de Kloet (2005) argued, the development of the Chinese rock industry is kind of like a constant negotiation of 'Chineseness' in the face of commercialization and globalization - it not only has the responsibility to show Chinese characteristics to the global market, but it also cannot completely give up the pursuit of commercial interests. Therefore, as mentioned in Chapter 3, we can see that many of the musicians in the early Chinese rock scene have tried to use the sound of some traditional Chinese instruments in their works. However, I personally do not think it can really help create the uniqueness of Chinese rock, because even if using the Chinese instruments, in terms of culture,

including the interpretation of authenticity of Chinese rock, the gender norm in the fandom of rock, etc. Chinese rock is still a copycat of the original West version. Although the results of these early attempts may not be ideal, it does not mean that it is impossible to create a unique rock culture in China while taking into account both commercialization and globalization. Instead, there have been scholars who have pointed out that the co-existence of globalization and marketization has actually created some spaces for the re-emergence of Chinese rock (Gu, X., O'Connor, J., & Ng, J., 2019).

Just as shown in the example of the involvement of fangirls in the Chinese rock music scene, first, it is the result of Chinese rock trying to go mainstream and approach further commercial benefits. Secondly, the most important reason why fangirls can be accepted into the Chinese rock music scene is that they can bring benefits to the scene. In addition, we cannot deny that the involvement of a large number of fangirls has not only challenged the long-constructed criteria of the authenticity of Chinese rock, but has also changed the stereotype that female fans can only be viewed by men in the rock music scene. Here, Chinese rock has begun to create its own culture – in terms of the genre, it is still rock (originating from the West), but its newly established relationship with female fans is completely different from the Western rock scene. Perhaps the use of Chinese musical instruments cannot make Chinese rock unique because musicians in other countries can also use the sound of Chinese musical instruments to show an exotic style. However, creating its own culture in the context of China allows Chinese rock to form an independent catalogue in the space of global rock culture so that it can be noticed by the world.

Therefore, I argue that the process of fangirls and the Chinese rock music scene learning to cooperate with each other can actually be considered as a process of Chinese rock music learning to inhabit global cultural spaces through a process of 'worlding'. Although the current changes made by Chinese rock are not enough to be noticed by the world, I believe that if it can continue to follow this trend and keep developing its own culture, Chinese rock will sooner or later be able to win more attention from the world.

Chapter 7.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the journey of Chinese rock music from the underground to the mainstream and have also explored the changing roles of female fans in the Chinese rock music scene - from groupies that are 'being viewed' to the fangirls who can be considered as 'active viewers', from passive consumers to more proactive ones. Such a shift of positions of female fans also led to changes in the interpretation of the authenticity of Chinese rock, challenging the long-constructed gender norms in popular music, that is, rock is male, while pop is female. By conducting this project, I highlighted the gendered nature of the music fandom by framing it as a global trend that is also not in line with social justice, and argued that every single person, regardless of gender, has the right to be a part of any kind of music scene. Taking Chinese fangirls as an example, I explained how female fans bring their own authentic structure into the Chinese rock music scene, challenging the stereotype that women can only be viewed by men in the rock world. Through the actions of these fangirls, we can see that even in the rock scenes that have long been considered male-dominated, female fans have every right to participate, create value, and be respected.

However, at present, the 'respect' shown to fangirls by the Chinese rock music scene is not completely fair, and still contains a little bit of discrimination against female fans. The reason why the Chinese rock industry chose to open its arms to fangirls is because it saw the benefits brought by them - which is absolutely a double standard, because when the fan happens to be a man, even if he doesn't spend a penny, he will not be questioned as a rock fan will not be questioned.

But, no matter for what purpose, acceptance of fangirls in the rock world has actually witnessed the changes in the Chinese rock music scene. More and more rock bands began to go up from the underground to a more mainstream level, learning to repackage themselves like pop idols, joining TV shows, and interacting with their fans on social media. Although this may be a result driven by consumerism, we cannot ignore the important role of fangirls' collective actions in reshaping the rock music scene in China today. Through the innovation driven by and for fangirls, the Chinese rock scene

is actually creating its own culture, rather than simply copying the West. This can be regarded as a process of worlding, in which Chinese rock is learning to develop its uniqueness to catch the attention of the global market. Although the existing innovations are currently not enough to be noticed by the global music industry, it is a good start. With more and more reality shows of bands appearing in China, I believe this trend will continue, and I am looking forward to seeing Chinese rock finally find its own way to inhabit the global rock culture space.

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