Political Expression in Non-mainstream Metaphorical Music:Exploring the Metaphorical Musical Works of Hong Kong, China-based Artist Wong Yiu Ming

Yanqing Yang [1, *]

[1] School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds, Yorkshire, UK.

* Correspondence: Yanqing Yang, School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds, Yorkshire, UK.

Abstract: The intensification of authoritarian ideology and censorship in China has made it increasingly challenging to communicate politically sensitive messages through cultural products (Ye and Zhao, 2023). To navigate these constraints, it is crucial to examine the strategic use of political metaphors in music. This dissertation explores the political metaphors embedded in the musical oeuvre of Wong Yiu-Ming (Anthony Wong), a prominent artist from Hong Kong, China. Through a comprehensive analysis of imagery and textual content, this study investigates how these metaphors facilitate the expression of political orientations and assesses the impact of Wong's identity and actions on his audience. The findings suggest that non-mainstream music holds a distinct political significance compared to mainstream music. Metaphorical representations in non-mainstream music effectively challenge state power by circumventing censorship, leveraging the global industrial network, enabling political expression, and aligning with the artist's multifaceted identity.

Keywords: political expression; non-mainstream metaphorical music; *Wong Yiu Ming* (Anthony Wong); gender politics

1. Introduction

Since Xi Jinping's ascension to power in 2013, the censorship of cultural products in China has intensified, with numerous cultural terms being designated as "sensitive" (Ye & Zhao, 2023). This heightened regulation has significantly constrained musical texts and expressions, resulting in the banning or subtle circulation of many cultural products. Politically themed popular music now frequently relies on metaphors, audiovisual effects, and related activities to convey political identity and influence audiences. This underscores the necessity for a deeper exploration of the transmission and utility of political metaphors in music.

Music wields the power to shape perception, emotion, and behavior, serving as a conduit for communication between artists and listeners through elements such as timbre, rhythm, and performance settings (Pannese et al., 2016). Historically, popular music has engaged with social issues since the advent of mass media, although much of it continues to focus on themes such as love and friendship, often neglecting more profound political or social themes (Riches et al., 2014). Research on non-mainstream music, particularly gen-

res such as rap and R&B, highlights how these forms address topics like freedom, discrimination, and violence (Sernoe, 2005), which frequently conflict with political systems, relegating them to the underground (Lee, 2012; Liu, 2014).

Metaphors in music, as conceptualized by Deignan (2005) and Ritchie (2003), enable artists to transcend literal meanings, revealing connections between words and broader social concepts. This study examines how music conveys emotions and ideas through metaphors, shaping political perceptions. For example, metaphorical rock music in 1990s Serbia was employed to express discontent with the government (Mijatovic, 2008), demonstrating music's potential as a political tool. However, research within the Chinese context remains limited. In the face of China's stringent censorship regime, non-mainstream music has emerged as a vehicle for fostering public political consciousness, warranting further investigation.

This study focuses on Wong Yiu-Ming's music as a case study to explore political metaphors. It aims to understand the role of metaphor in musical composition and political identity, the function of non-mainstream music as a form of political activism, and how Wong's multiple identities as an LGBTQ+ individual and activist influence his political expression. The research seeks to uncover how metaphors in music assist artists in navigating censorship while promoting political ideologies.

2. Literature Review

This section provides a comprehensive review of interdisciplinary research on music, politics, and metaphors, identifying a significant gap in the literature concerning the use of metaphors in Chinese music to express political views. It explores the social functions of music, metaphor theory, and its application to politics, with particular attention to the underexplored area of non-mainstream music in China and the use of metaphors to articulate identity and political beliefs.

2.1. The Impact of Music on Society

Music has the capacity to influence emotions and cognition, shaping social relationships and identity through empathy (Clarke et al., 2015). Hesmondhalgh (2014) emphasizes music's potential to convey protest and foster social bonds. The structural elements of music, such as rhythm and melody, evoke universal emotions and facilitate interaction between creators and listeners, promoting public participation in social movements. Music can unify individuals under a shared ideology and become a symbol of identity.

The reproducibility of popular music transcends national boundaries, playing a pivotal role in globalization and shaping cognitive frameworks across social groups (Lipsitz, 1994; Frith, 1996).

2.2. The Consideration of Non-Mainstream Music

Mainstream music predominantly focuses on themes like love, often overlooking social and political issues. In contrast, non-mainstream music defies the commercial trends of the mainstream industry, frequently embracing experimental, innovative, and indie productions (Shuker, 2013). The use of metaphors in non-mainstream music is particularly significant in conveying abstract concepts and emotions. Yet, current research largely neglects metaphorical texts in non-mainstream music, focusing instead on vocals, language, and regional characteristics. The identities of marginalized creators, such as LGBTQ+ individuals, also remain underexplored.

Non-mainstream music is often likened to alternative media, representing minority perspectives and social issues (Atton & Compton, 2007). This analogy suggests that non-mainstream music, much like alternative media, has the potential to challenge power structures, offering a platform for political and social discourse.

2.3. Non-mainstream Music, Artists, and the Global Political Economy

Since the rise of neoliberalism, music has traversed boundaries as a cultural production. Polanyi's (1985) "double movement" theory and Rancière's (1999) "Movement of Equality" underscore the tension between market forces and social stability. The role of music in the political economy is evident in how it shapes identities and influences politics through cultural commodification.

Non-mainstream music often addresses socio-political issues, such as LGBTQ+ rights and racial discrimination, employing aesthetics to convey political messages (Franke & Schiltz, 2013). However, mainstream artists frequently conform to public expectations, which can limit their political expression (Roussel, 2007). While non-mainstream artists assert their political identities, mainstream creators sometimes promote political ideas for commercial gain, thereby diluting their impact.

Political, economic, and cultural forces shape the production and consumption of music. By applying Polanyi and Rancière's theories, we gain a deeper understanding of music's role in political movements, where metaphors serve as tools for artists to navigate censorship while expressing resistance.

2.4. The Concept of Metaphor and its Application to Music

Metaphors, by drawing comparisons between different concepts, allow creators to communicate abstract ideas through music. Scholars debate whether metaphors are rooted in language or thought, with the latter providing a broader framework for interpreting music (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This study contends that metaphors in music function interactively, mapping social experiences onto musical elements. The transmission of metaphors is influenced by the heterogeneity of the audience's cultural background, cognitive styles, and personal preferences, which, in turn, develop and extend additional meanings beyond the underlying corpus. This corpus serves as the foundation upon which creators construct shared perceptions through musical metaphors, thereby transmitting political ideologies.

Mijatovic (2008) highlights how Serbian political movements utilized metaphors in rock music to critique authority, demonstrating how metaphors transcend linguistic boundaries. By employing metaphors, music can evoke empathy and shape listeners' understanding of political issues. However, the inherent ambiguity of metaphors may lead to varied interpretations, potentially obscuring the creator's intent while also aiding in the evasion of censorship.

2.5. Global Studies in Metaphorical Music and Politics

Research on non-mainstream music and metaphors has predominantly centered on Europe and the United States, with East Asian music receiving comparatively less attention. The history of Western-centric thinking and neoliberalism has shaped research in the West, while studies of Chinese music often focus on ethnic minority regions and more intense genres like hip-hop (Davis, 2021).

Jian (2018) discusses the emergence of non-mainstream music in East Asia, inspired by Western punk movements. However, research on mainland China remains limited, primarily concentrating on underground rock and Cantonese-language genres. The intersection of non-mainstream music, metaphors, and political identity in China is underexplored, leaving a gap in understanding how censorship influences musical expression.

2.6. Summary

The literature reveals a significant gap in research concerning how Chinese artists use metaphors to express political identities, particularly in non-radical, non-mainstream music. The censorship environment in China, coupled with the underdevelopment of non-mainstream music, has impeded research in this area. Metaphors offer a means to

bypass censorship, serving political and cultural functions while promoting self-expression. However, existing research often fails to consider how the identities and acknowledged ideologies of creators significantly influence their work. Therefore, further investigation is necessary to understand how metaphors shape political identity in Chinese non-mainstream music, especially for marginalized creators. This study aims to fill these gaps by analyzing Wong Yiu-Ming's use of metaphors to convey political ideas.

3. Methodology

3.1. Methodological Design

This study explores how metaphors in non-mainstream music serve as instruments for political activism and discourse, particularly in relation to LGBTQ+ identity within politically sensitive contexts. Given the complexity and cultural embeddedness of metaphors, quantitative methods are insufficient for capturing their nuances. Instead, qualitative case analysis allows for an in-depth exploration of the interplay between power, politics, and metaphors in non-mainstream music, making it a suitable approach for this research. Qualitative methods enable a detailed examination of Wong's musical and performance content, revealing the underlying themes and political messages. The analysis encompasses the interpretation of lyrics, performances, and media content, providing insights into the artist's political expression and the role of metaphors in evading censorship.

3.2. Analysis Framework

This study applies Critical Metaphor Theory (CMT) to examine Wong Yiu-Ming's works. Relevant audio, video, and textual materials are analyzed for metaphorical references to political events and themes, such as the 1997 Hong Kong handover. The analysis seeks to understand how metaphors reflect Wong's personal identity and the broader political context. Comparative analysis with other studies enhances the relevance and robustness of the findings.

CMT, a linguistic theory that integrates discourse analysis and pragmatics, is employed to assess how metaphors shape political thought and influence audiences. This method allows for an exploration of how Wong's metaphors communicate political ideologies while circumventing censorship.

3.3. Analytical Components

Musical Analysis: This involves examining musical elements such as melody, harmony, and structure to uncover the composer's intentions and political messages.

Textual Analysis: This focuses on interpreting the metaphors in Wong's lyrics, analyzing their political meanings, and situating them within existing literature.

Cultural and Psychosocial Analysis: This explores the impact of Wong's music on listeners' emotions and perceptions, integrating cultural and psychological theories to understand the broader significance of his work in political contexts.

3.4. Artist Introduction

Wong Yiu-Ming is a distinguished Hong Kong singer and social activist. Renowned for his musical talent and advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights, democracy, and freedom, his music frequently addresses sensitive political issues. His involvement in significant social movements, such as the 2014 Umbrella Revolution and the 2019 Anti-Extradition Law Movement, underscores his commitment to political activism. Despite censorship, his works continue to circulate, albeit discreetly, providing critical case studies for understanding the use of metaphors in political music.

Wong's multifaceted identity—as an LGBTQ+ individual, artist, and political activist—offers rich material for studying how metaphors enable him to express political views while navigating restrictions. His work provides a valuable case for exploring the dynamics of social change and political discourse through metaphorical music.

Figure 1. Photograph of Wong Yiu Ming and other LGBTQ+ people hold up a rainbow sign saying 'Comrades still need to work hard', based on Amnesty International, 2019.

3.5. Case Selection and Limitations

The selection of case studies for this research was guided by several criteria, including the thematic content of the songs, the reactions from both audiences and mass media, the metaphorical representation of political events and narratives, the non-mainstream nature of the musical expressions, the political inclinations and identities of the songwriters, and the experimental and innovative characteristics of the live performances. These factors were instrumental in identifying works that are both representative and significant for analysis.

This study examines the following selected works by Wong Yiu-Ming: A Forbidden Fruit Once Per Day (Wong and Lau, 1996), Forbidden Colors (Wong and Lau, 1988), and Red Diffusion (Wong, 2016). These case studies are analyzed across various dimensions, including lyrics, melodies, and performance styles.

However, certain limitations of this study must be acknowledged. The methodology may be influenced by the subjective perspectives of the researcher, which could lead to interpretative bias. Additionally, qualitative methods typically yield rich, detailed textual analyses that are challenging to quantify. This poses difficulties in comparing results across different studies or conducting statistical analyses. Furthermore, the extensive textual content may constrain the scope for further comparative validation of metaphorical theories. Regarding data collection, while Wong Yiu-Ming (Anthony Wong) has an extensive body of work and live performance material, his political stance, which contrasts with that of the Chinese central government, has resulted in the incomplete availability of video and audio recordings of some of his works within mainland China, including Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and international platforms (e.g., YouTube, Spotify). Consequently, the selection of cases in this paper is informed by a balance of accessibility and research significance.

4. Case Studies and Analyses

Building on the aforementioned criteria, this chapter presents case studies to explore how artists, particularly those under restrictive political regimes, employ metaphors in their creative processes—ranging from lyrics and arrangements to rhythms and performance styles—to articulate their concerns about social and political issues. These analyses offer insights for artists on how to navigate the increasingly stringent media and cultural policies imposed by Chinese authorities while continuing to express their political orientations.

4.1. Case studies

4.1.1. Subordination and Resistance in Metaphorical Music

This section conducts a focused analysis of the lyrics in Wong's works, particularly the linguistic metaphors, to explore how the artist's viewpoints are conveyed through the interplay of diverse musical styles and metaphorical language.

A Forbidden Fruit Once Per Day (Wong and Lau, 1996):

Composed on the eve of Hong Kong's return to China in 1997, this song adopts a light, sardonic, and humorous tone. Originally, the lyrics were intended to express dissatisfaction with Apple Daily and to provoke thought on the theme of 'choice.' After Hong Kong's return to China, the song has been subject to multiple interpretations, particularly concerning issues such as freedom of expression, sexual orientation, and other sensitive topics related to authority. In this composition, the universally favored 'apples' symbolize the secular and conventional herd mentality, while the remaining fruits represent a broader scope for individual freedom of choice.

Table 1. Lyric text comparison of the composition 1.

Cantonese Original Lyrics	English Comparison Lyrics
園林內有個人 常常問我要什麼	'There's a man in the garden who always asks me what I want.'
根本選擇不多 每日都只有蘋果	'There's not much to choose from. It's just apples every day.'
人人話我太傻 完全沒有顧後果	'People say I'm too stupid to think about the consequences.'
偏偏選擇芒果 我問芒果有毒麼	'I preferred mangoes. I asked if they were poisonous.'
菩提下有個人 言談類似哲學科	'There's a man under the Bodhi who talks like a philosopher.'
說青春好像生果 種什麼得到什麼	'Youth is like a fruit. What you sow, you reap.'
旁人望見幼苗 連忙問我種什麼	'When people look at the seedlings, they ask me what I'm planting.'
假使不是一夥 我就等於怪物麼	'If we're not the same, am I a monster?'
檸檬 西瓜也是禁果	'Lemon and watermelon are also forbidden fruits.'
橙 石榴受到折磨	'Orange. Pomegranates are tortured.'
提子 香蕉控罪更多	'Raisinets, bananas, more offences.'
都不妥	'All of them are inappropriate.'
別人那一個 並沒什麼吸引我	'There's nothing about that other guy's stuff that appeals to me.'
是牛頓 自己想太多	'Newton's overthinking it (The apple).'
別人看不過 落力用心感化我	'Other people can't stand it anymore. They influence me with their hearts.'
食蘋果 讓芒果遠離我	'Eating Apples. Keep Mangoes Away!'
食蘋果 讓醫生 遠離我	'Eating apples. Keeps the doctor away!'

In this song, society's overwhelming preference for 'apples' and the corresponding rejection of other fruits serve as symbols of the prevailing herd mentality. This metaphor invites listeners to reflect on the tension between identity formed by societal conformity and personal choice. The narrative describes various individuals selecting fruits in a garden, where the protagonist is repeatedly asked what kind of fruit he desires. Despite the apparent variety, apples are almost the only option presented, and the protagonist's curiosity about other fruits (such as mangoes) elicits horror from others, symbolizing fear of the unknown. This leads the protagonist to question, "Am I a monster?"—expressing his bewilderment at the unfounded prejudices against diverse choices and reaffirming his

commitment to independent decision-making. This stance is in stark contrast to the metaphorical choices imposed by societal norms (Schroeder, 2013).

The song implicitly distinguishes between two main groups: the submissive majority, the self-reflective minority, and the overarching restrictive environment.

Firstly, the lyrics "There's not much to choose from" and "It's just apples every day" highlight the limited cultural resources and the oppressive social atmosphere within the broader macro-environment. This sentiment echoes the confusion and fear experienced by the Hong Kong public on the eve of the 1997 handover to the Communist Party of China (CPC) (Ho, 2000). Interestingly, the composer introduces the song in the key of G major, with driving drumbeats and clanging percussion, creating a bright tone that contrasts sharply with the constrained social environment. This juxtaposition serves as a playful metaphor, heightening the listener's curiosity by contrasting the upbeat music with the song's themes of restriction (Schroeder, 2013). The crowd's expressed stupidity and fear of 'consequences' stand in opposition to the protagonist's curiosity about the 'mango'—a metaphor for alternative choices and ideas. This contrast illustrates the societal backlash individuals face when they harbor independent thoughts. In the latter part of the song, the use of terms like 'monsters,' 'lemons,' and 'watermelons' to describe different fruits reflects the diversity of people and choices in society. However, the pervasive herd mentality prevents most individuals from mustering the courage to make independent choices, leading them to silently agree with the conclusion that "none of them is right." During this bridge, Wong employs a repetitive choral effect with deep male voices, while reducing the upbeat string and synthesizer accompaniment to metaphorically convey his disapproval and disappointment, gradually transitioning the music to a more somber tone (Franke and Schiltz, 2013; Schroeder, 2013).

Finally, the composer underscores the sentiment with the line, "there's nothing about that other guy's stuff that appeals to me," advocating for independent thought and resistance to conformity. In the final repetitions of the chorus, the reduction of string accompaniment and the intensification of drumbeats enhance the sense of disappointment both sonically and melodically (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Schroeder, 2013; Pannese et al., 2016). The composer's position is further articulated through the metaphorical techniques embedded within the music. The song's resonance with the public is evidenced by its recognition, including three top song titles awarded by television stations and other accolades within the Hong Kong music industry (Wikipedia, 2015).

Through the use of irony and metaphor, Wong effectively critiques social homogeneity and the herd mentality in his music, encouraging society to engage in independent, self-selective thinking (Ritchie, 2003; Deignan, 2005; Schroeder, 2013), even in the face of an increasingly restrictive social environment. His work conveys a civic consciousness rooted in democracy, freedom, and resistance, which gained significant social relevance following Hong Kong's handover in 1997. This analysis illustrates how musical metaphors can serve as a powerful medium for expressing dissent and provoking social reflection (Ho, 2000; Flusberg et al., 2018).

4.1.2. Gender Politics in Musical Metaphors

Wong's advocacy for democracy and equality is not confined to his critiques of the social atmosphere; it also extends to the realm of gender politics, particularly in an era when the homosexual community faced widespread intolerance. Wong has crafted musical works that address gender politics through metaphorical techniques. These works had a significant impact in Hong Kong during the 1980s and continue to influence mainland China today, where LGBTQ+ communities remain marginalized. The following case study examines how Wong's use of metaphor effectively circumvented Chinese censorship, allowing his music to persist on a limited scale in international markets, thereby continuing to convey his political ideology.

Forbidden Colors (Wong and Lau, 1988):

The theme of this song centers on marginalized groups who were unrecognized and discriminated against by mainstream society, specifically focusing on the homosexual community. Through the use of musical metaphors, Wong conveys the social judgment and internal conflict experienced by these minority groups. He expresses his support for these non-mainstream communities, his apprehension about the social environment of the time, and his metaphorical pursuit of awareness regarding freedom, democracy, and gender equality.

Table 2. Lyric text comparison of the composition 2.

Cantonese Original Lyrics	English Comparison Lyrics
窗边雨水	'Rain at the window'
拼命地侵扰安睡	'Trying desperately to disturb your peaceful sleep.'
又再撒湿乱发堆	'And then the pile of hair gets wet and messy again.'
无需惶恐	'There's no need to panic.'
你在受惊中淌泪	'You're in shock and you're crying.'
别怕! 爱本是无罪	'Don't be afraid! Love is not sinful.'
请关上窗	'Close the window, please.'
寄望梦想於今後	'Hoping for a dream in the future.'
让我再握着你手	'Let me hold your hand again.'
无需逃走	'There's no need to run away.'
世俗目光虽荒谬	'The world's gaze is ridiculous.'
为你　我甘愿承受	'For you, I'm willing to suffer.'
千种痛哀	'A thousand sorrows.'
结在梦魇的心内	'Tangled up in an already nightmarish mind.'
愿我到死未悔改	'I won't regret or change till I die.'
时钟停止	'Clock stops.'
我在耐心的等待	'I'm waiting patiently.'
害怕雨声在门内	'Fear of the rain coming indoors.'
愿某地方	'Wish such a place existed.'
不需将爱伤害	'There's no need for love to hurt.'
抹杀内心的色彩	'Erasing the colours of the heart.'
愿某日子	'Wish someday existed.'
不需苦痛忍耐	'There's no need to endure pain.'
将禁色尽染在梦魂内	'I infiltrate all the restricted colours into my soul and dreams.'
若这地方必须将爱伤害	'If this place is bound to hurt love.'
抹杀内心的色彩	'Erasing the colours of the heart'
让我就此消失这晚风雨内	'Let me disappear into the night storm.'
可再生在某梦幻年代	'And renewable in some fantasy era.'

In this song, the artist adopts a first-person narrative directed toward an unnamed companion, utilizing repeated phrases such as "panic," "love is not sinful," and "the world's gaze is ridiculous" to articulate the profound pain and helplessness experienced by the homosexual community and other marginalized groups. The lyrics embody a yearning for a more equitable future, reflecting the artist's engagement with gender politics, his commitment to freedom, and the ongoing struggle for equality.

The opening imagery, with references to "rain at the window," serves as a metaphor for the social discrimination faced by homosexuals, where "rain" symbolizes offensive remarks and societal prejudice. The recurring use of the word "panic" encapsulates the inner turmoil and anxiety endured by these marginalized groups. Moreover, the derogatory

application of "ridiculous" underscores Wong's resistance to societal judgment of homosexuality, highlighting the unreasonable and oppressive social climate of the time.

Musically, the song is characterized by a minimalist arrangement of piano and strings, which amplifies the emotional resonance of the slogan "Love is not sinful." The interplay of metaphorical lyrics with the melody effectively conveys the artist's pro-LGBTQ+ stance, particularly when considered alongside Wong's public coming out in 2012.

Wong's active participation in social movements, such as the BigLove Alliance, further exemplifies the seamless integration of his public identity with his political and personal convictions. His employment of metaphors in music not only addresses gender politics but also intertwines his self-awareness with his sense of civic responsibility, enabling him to articulate political messages through his artistic expressions.

Nevertheless, despite his activism and public advocacy, the political rights of the LGBTQ+ community in Hong Kong have seen limited progress. The thematic repetition of the word "forbidden" within the song evokes deeper societal taboos and restrictions, symbolizing the pervasive control of political power over individual freedoms. Wong's metaphorical expression of his aspirations for freedom and democracy not only reflects his personal struggles but also offers a broader critique of the societal and political constraints prevalent in Hong Kong.

4.1.3. Political Metaphors and Diverse Musical Forms

C. Red Diffusion (Wong,2016):

Wong Yiu-Ming's concert was more of a musical experiment than a conventional performance, blending adaptations of classic Hong Kong TV themes with historical reflections on Asia Television Limited (ATV) and explorations of local identity and politics. Through a synthesis of visuals, interviews, and interactive elements, Wong utilized the concert as a platform to examine the economic downturn following the Umbrella Movement and the erosion of Hong Kong's cultural identity. The stage's tripartite setup, with a symbolic fissure in the background, metaphorically represented the fractured trust between Hong Kong and the central government, as well as the city's internal societal divisions.

One particularly striking moment involved a reimagined version of the song "The Great Man," originally a tribute to police valor. Performed with a tone of irony, it served as a critique of police brutality during the Umbrella Movement. Accompanied by visuals depicting a woman confronting police officers, the performance vividly expressed Wong's disapproval of authoritarianism and highlighted the absence of genuine democracy in Hong Kong.

Wong's rendition of "Crocodile Tears" further underscored themes of political hypocrisy. The accompanying visuals featured prominent politicians shedding tears, a clear metaphor for deceit and insincere governance. The juxtaposition of these images with the song's lyrics provoked strong reactions from the audience, eliciting both laughter and boos, which reflected the public's growing disillusionment with political figures. This potent combination of visual and musical metaphors effectively conveyed a powerful critique of political duplicity.

Through his use of political metaphors, concert design, and performance art, Wong successfully communicated a critical perspective on Hong Kong's political landscape. By relying on symbolic representation and audience engagement rather than overt language, he was able to deliver a nuanced and compelling message.

Figure 2. Photograph shows concert backdrop wiping away tears for Hong Kong officials, based on Ho, 2016.

Moreover, the metaphor embedded in the theme of "Red Diffusion" (Wong, 2016) warrants particular attention. The term "Red Diffusion" can be interpreted by political entities as representative of radical leftist ideologies, resonating with the symbolism of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the impact of the Umbrella Movement. The word "Diffusion" serves as a metaphor for the pervasive spread of Red Terror, symbolizing the extensive infiltration of the Chinese Communist regime and its efforts to suppress democratic subversion. This theme, when considered alongside Wong's active participation in social movements, clearly articulates his opposition to the CPC's repressive policies and the tightening grip of dictatorship (Flusberg et al., 2018).

At the conclusion of the concert, Wong engaged with the audience through public readings, accompanied by video clips featuring prominent figures involved in social movements. He reiterated the concepts of "Hong Kong will not die," "advocating politics," and "changing the political ecology," while posing provocative questions to the audience, such as "What kind of Hong Kong do you want?" and "What should we do?" (Wong, 2016). In the context of the Umbrella Movement (Hansen Edwards, 2016; Rühlig, 2016), these metaphors imbue the songs with additional layers of meaning, allowing listeners to connect the music with real-world events, thereby amplifying its political impact (Jones, 2017; Leung, 2020). The interplay between music and political ideas within the dimly lit concert setting, coupled with the specific social context of the metaphors, blurs the traditional boundaries between art and politics. This transformation elevates the music from mere entertainment to a potent political statement, further resonating with the audience (Franke and Schiltz, 2013; Botstein, 2014). The experimental, innovative, and interactive nature of these concerts also deepens the connection between the music and the audience, fostering a more immersive experience. This interaction transforms the audience from passive listeners into active participants, thereby enhancing the dissemination of political messages (Burton, 2018; Lai, 2018).

Wong's concert, with its use of songs, metaphors, and video clips, effectively conveys his political stance in response to increasingly tense political dynamics. Despite facing significant obstacles, including the termination of his contract by his record label and censorship from mainland authorities, Wong's creative strategies underscore his commitment to maintaining independence and resistance in a complex political landscape. This demonstrates the effectiveness of using metaphorical music as a non-violent form of resistance against authoritarian regimes.

4.1.4. Metaphorical Music and Political Economic Interplay

This paper argues that the censorship and blocking of works by Wong and other similar artists by mainland authorities is indicative of the successful transmission of their political identities (Franke and Schiltz, 2013; Botstein, 2014). When regimes recognize that a particular cultural product carries a charged ideology or political identity capable of influencing public political consciousness (Wong and Liu, 2018), they often seek to preserve

their own ideological dominance to maintain social order and consolidate power. When metaphorical cultural products convey messages incompatible with the regime's ideology (Rancière, 1999), the state may assert its control through censorship, particularly by blocking content.

Given that self-expression through media is a fundamental measure of democracy (Lorentzen, 2014), free media, including streaming platforms distributing music and art, can play a catalytic role in challenging authoritarian regimes. These media outlets contribute to the formation of a socio-cultural system that fosters democratic stability. However, since Xi Jinping assumed the presidency of China in 2013, the CPC's political authoritarianism and censorship have intensified, especially concerning political control and information suppression. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, along with certain news sites and search engines, have been restricted, blocked, or entirely removed. Internet censorship in China also involves the blocking of keywords and deletion of posts on politically sensitive topics (Man, 2020; Ye and Zhao, 2023). Chinese social media is fragmented across numerous local websites, with hundreds of thousands of staff dedicated to censoring content (Chen and Ang, 2011). Out of 197 countries claiming to have a free press, China ranks 187th, making it one of the most heavily censored nations (Freedom House, 2012, cited in KING et al., 2013). Herold and Marolt (2011) also note that Chinese citizens face censorship when they criticize government policies or ideas.

As the media serves as a platform for public discourse and critical debate, it can threaten state authority when negative commentary accumulates. Consequently, under authoritarian regimes, particularly in China, the standards and mechanisms for controlling media culture are continuously reinforced (Lorentzen, 2014). Given that censorship often deals with sensitive topics and power dynamics, the significance of metaphors increases, transforming abstract political issues into more tangible expressions, thereby communicating their significance more effectively and evading regulation to some extent. Therefore, music, media, and political metaphors collaborate to articulate political orientations and circumvent strict political censorship.

The authorities' efforts to block communication not only serve as a deterrent to creators but also signal the impact and relevance of Wong Yiu-Ming's works in conveying political identities. In the context of globalization, neoliberalism tightly intertwines politics, economics, and culture; music and entertainment become commodified, circulating as valuable products. Entertainment can be monopolized by the economy, and political power can merge with monopoly capital to achieve the 'politicization of entertainment.' Through the globalization of capital (Hesmondhalgh and Negus, 2002), political power infiltrates cultural products and daily life, maintaining a strong grip on ideology. Under tightened authoritarian regimes, media and cultural products are heavily censored, even if the public remains unaware of the pervasive influence (HUANG, 2001; Tai, 2014). By controlling economic goods through political power and employing censorship systems to restrict sensitive language (Lorentzen, 2014; Ye and Zhao, 2023), regimes achieve their goal of limiting cultural and ideological dissemination, including the outright banning of certain artists' works and performances. Non-mainstream music, distinct from the commercialized and inherently hollow symbolism of mainstream tracks, employs content-based strategies to circumvent such restrictions.

In this context, creators combine politically sensitive topics with metaphorical techniques to engage in self-reflection on issues such as 'sexual minorities,' 'resistance,' 'democracy,' and 'liberty' (Ho, 2000). The regime's censorship of Wong's metaphorical music can thus be interpreted as a reaction to its perceived power and influence. In the neoliberal context, this reflects the complex interplay between political and economic power, cultural communication, and the regime's efforts to intervene in the commercial market to shape and direct public political identity. The metaphorical expression of political identity by creators serves as a powerful defense against such authoritarian measures.

4.2. Summary

Regimes can restrict the dissemination of culture and ideology through censorship, using non-mainstream music to convey political ideology through symbolic systems. While this strategy successfully addresses social issues such as sexual minorities, resistance, and democracy, it also creates barriers to comprehension, as not all listeners may fully grasp the artist's intentions. To better understand musical works, it is crucial to consider the artist's behavior, identity, political stance, and emotional expression, placing the work within its specific historical and social context. This approach requires examining the intersection of politics, economics, culture, and history. In conclusion, the combination of metaphor and music plays a vital role in engaging with politics, serving both as artistic expression and a potent form of political resistance.

5. Conclusion

This paper examines how Wong Yiu-Ming (Anthony Wong) effectively employs metaphors in non-mainstream music to convey political concepts such as freedom of choice, LGBTQ+ rights, and democracy. Through his lyrics, musical arrangements, and performances, Wong successfully expresses resistance to societal norms and promotes the principle of free choice, eliciting strong audience responses. Wong's identity as an LGBTQ+ individual adds a personal dimension to his political stance. However, the study finds that revealing such identities may sometimes backfire, attracting censorship rather than support. While metaphors can serve as a protective "umbrella" to some extent, their effectiveness diminishes when combined directly with the personal identity of an artist with a distinct political orientation. Moreover, the analysis demonstrates that state power can restrict the dissemination of ideology through the globalized culture industry. It is essential to recognize that non-mainstream music and metaphor can function as both a double-edged sword and a powerful tool for authorities to reconstruct civic culture through political economy and musical commodities. This reverse osmosis involves the infiltration and fusion of cultures, particularly those dominated by power. Future authorities may reshape individual and social identities through musical allegory rather than solely relying on censorship of ideologically charged works and images. This phenomenon warrants further investigation and defense in future studies.

References

1. Amnesty International. 2019. Interview with Anthony Wong: Fighting an Unnameable Fear in Hong Kong. Amnesty International Chinese. [Online]. Available from: https://zh.amnesty.org/content-type/more-resources
2. Antonova T.G. 2014. Social Conflict through Conceptual Metaphor in Media Discourse. Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences. 154, pp. 368–373.
3. Atton C. and Compton J.R. 2007. An Alternative Internet: Radical Media Politics and Creativity. Journalism Studies. 8(2), pp. 357–358.
4. BBC News. 2021. 'Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) Prosecutes Singer Anthony Wong for Allegedly 'Providing Entertainment to Others to Induce Them to Vote'. BBC News Chinese. [Online]. Available from: https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/chinese-news
5. Biddle I.D. and Knights V. 2006. Music, National Identity, and the Politics of Location. Aldershot: Ashgate.
6. BigLove Alliance. [n.d.]. Home. BigLove Alliance. [Online]. Available from: http://biglovealliance.org/
7. Botstein L. 2014. Collaboration, Principle, and Compromise: Negotiating the Links Between Music and Politics. The Musical Quarterly. 97(4), pp. 489–498.
8. Burton J. 2018. Warring with Words: Narrative and Metaphor in Politics. Studies in Continuing Education. 40(2), pp. 234–235.
9. Cabral R.J. 2020. Billboard Global 200. Billboard. [Online]. Available from: https://www.billboard.com/charts/billboard-global-200/
10. Chan S. 2012. Anthony Wong Admitted His Sexuality During the Concert (Subtitled Version). www.youtube.com. [Online]. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yi4yDrEg74Y
11. Charteris-Black J. 2011. Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
12. Clarke E., DeNora T., and Vuoskoski J. 2015. Music, Empathy, and Cultural Understanding. Physics of Life Reviews. 15, pp. 61–88.

13. Deignan A. 2005. Metaphor and Corpus Linguistics. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

14. Flusberg S.J., Matlock T., and Thibodeau P.H. 2018. War Metaphors in Public Discourse. Metaphor and Symbol. 33(1), pp. 1–18.

15. Franke U. and Schiltz K. 2013. 'They Don't Really Care About Us!': On Political Worldviews in Popular Music. International Studies Perspectives. 14(1), pp. 39–55.

16. Ho W. 2000. The Political Meaning of Hong Kong Popular Music: A Review of Sociopolitical Relations Between Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China Since the 1980s. Popular Music. 19(3), pp. 341–353.

17. Kam Y.L. 2022. Queer Resistance in Popular Music: The Making of a Dissident Voice in Hong Kong. National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University Press. 35(10), pp. 29–48.

18. Lakoff G. and Johnson M. 1980. Metaphors We Live By. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

19. Lee C. 2012. Noise and Silence: Underground Music and Resistance in the People's Republic of China. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Southern California.

20. Lorentzen P. 2014. China's Strategic Censorship. American Journal of Political Science. 58(2), pp. 402–414.

21. Man I. 2020. Popular Music Censorship Under Chinese Societies: Selected Canto-pop Case Studies in China, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Asian Education and Development Studies. 10(4), pp. 536–543.

22. Mijatovic B. 2008. 'Throwing Stones at the System': Rock Music in Serbia During the 1990s. Music and Politics. II(2).

23. Pannese A., Rappaz M.-A., and Grandjean D. 2016. Metaphor and Music Emotion: Ancient Views and Future Directions. Consciousness and Cognition. 44, pp. 61–71.

24. Ritchie D. 2003. 'ARGUMENT IS WAR' – Or Is It a Game of Chess? Multiple Meanings in the Analysis of Implicit Metaphors. Metaphor and Symbol. 18(2), pp. 125–146.

25. Schroeder S. 2013. Music and Metaphor. British Journal of Aesthetics. 53(1), pp. 1–20.

26. Shuker R. 2013. Understanding Popular Music. Routledge.

27. Wong Y.M. and Lau Y.D. 1988. Forbidden Colors. Tat Ming Pair. Do You Still Love Me? [CD]. Hong Kong: Cantopop.

28. Wong Y.M. and Lau Y.D. 1996. A Forbidden Fruit Once Per Day. Tat Ming Pair. Viva! Viva! Viva! [CD]. Hong Kong: Cantopop.

29. Wong Y.M. 2016. Red Diffusion. [Live performance]. Yiu-ming Wong. 1 April 2016, Macpherson Stadium, Hong Kong.

30. Ye W. and Zhao L. 2023. 'I Know It's Sensitive': Internet Censorship, Recoding, and the Sensitive Word Culture in China. Discourse Context & Media. 51, p. 100666.