

## **Nan Shen (Nan), Haiqing Wang (Hai) in conversation:**

**Nan:** For me, pop music is a process of shaping the perception of love. I felt that when I was a child, I learned about love stories and how people love each other by listening and singing songs. The love in pop music is dramatic and attractive, and when you sing, you feel that you are the protagonist of that story, and you are substituting it, as if you are also experiencing it.

**Hai:** I feel that in our society, the education of love and the expression of emotion are missing. We learn love through reading romantic novels, listening to popular songs, and watching soap dramas. It seems that this way of treating love has further shaped the atmosphere of society.

**Nan:** I think these two things also influence each other, and the social atmosphere is also shaping this way of love. Moreover, music is a very direct medium. When lyrics are transmitted through the medium of melody, the experience is also very directly transmitted and has an impact. This process is what I particularly want to reproduce and experience.

**Hai:** Yes, music is very special as this medium. It creates a space where memories can be stored. Listening to music is a very personal action. Everyone has their own headphones. They listen to different music in different positions at different times. This song shapes everyone's unique memory to this time, space and atmosphere. But listening to music is also a very social action. People in a certain region in a certain period of time shared some common music. This music appeared in the bus that you take after work, cheap speakers from the small shop you pass by and the mobile phone ringtone, that occasionally rang during meetings. These music simultaneously shaped everyone's common memory of this reality, this society, and this culture.

**Nan:** Pop music is a background of collective life (or social life), in which we shape the body and emotions. Singing is very related to the body, it is a kind of exudation from the body, this kind of body movement is from the inside out, from the bottom up, this kind of body forms a kind of political possibility. We usually think of politics as top-down, textual, and theoretical. But in fact, politics is closely related to the body.

**Hai:** In this case, Karaoke seems to gather the bodies together in a very simple way. Karaoke is a very interesting phenomenon, just like club culture in western countries, karaoke is a very important part of daily life for most Asians. It is related to the Asian social environment, the way people interact and the way they express themselves. Listening to others singing and singing together has become a unique way of connecting and communicating with people. When the music plays, everyone starts to bring their memories, experiences and feelings into the shared space. This space is full of existing floating memories, and at the same time, new memories of the moment are constantly being produced. This is such a beautiful artistic moment. You are not looking at art, but participating in it.



**Nan:** I think participatory art is very important. I feel that it is something I want to do after listening to the needs of the body, and one part of this creation is completed with the participants.

**Hai:** Our initial idea was to form a band as a performer role. But I think we can be more open. For example, in a form like Karaoke, we are not just performers. In fact, we are also creating a stage, a scene or an event to allow the audience to participate in this atmosphere.

**Nan:** Yes, and in this scene, the love we mentioned before is our narrative, the subject of our event. This kind of love can be the love of men and women, non-binaries, the love of homosexuals, the love of animals, the love of plants, and the love of non-humans.

**Hai:** It reminds me, that in a popular Chinese music app, every song has thousands of comments. They commentators are talking about their feelings and their personal stories while listening to the same song. This song becomes a space for those emotions and stories to happen and to be remembered.

**Hai:** When I checked the history of Chinese pop music, I read that Chinese pop music was originally communist and patriotic songs. Later it came under the influence of the capitalistic commodification of music in Hong Kong and Taiwan - it changed from a big narrative, to personal stories and the expression of individual emotions.

**Nan:** Yes, the music of the lavish introduced from Hong Kong and Taiwan in the early days, because Hong Kong and Taiwan are areas where capitalism developed relatively early and their songs have been relatively heavily influenced by the West. Just like Faye Wong's songs in the early days, many of them are covers of songs by foreign singers and then rewritten words.

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**Nan:** I actually resisted narrative for a long time. Because I am doing painting, I think if it serves narrative, it is like a comic strip. It will lose the "essence" of painting, but in fact, the so-called essence of painting in the social environment is materialized. When painting is regarded as a separate object, separate body movement, I think the painting is a more comprehensive and complicated things than comic strips. But I found that narrative is actually very interesting for me. Through narrative and non-linear narrative in the Mount, the author describes the power relationship between different species and the power relationship between the same species in a very clever and unimaginable way. There are also some power relations between the sexes, which broke what I had always believed.

**Hai:** On the contrary, I have always liked narration. Because I believe that narrative is an original point, it can be connected to many possibilities, different times and spaces, different backgrounds. Art was very narrative in the early time. Many paintings described an event itself, and then gradually moved towards abstraction and concept. But today, with the explosion of technology and the In-

ternet, it seems that only concept is not enough any more. We are looking for a richer way of expression, which can include more details and in a more free way. This new narrative is often non-linear, net-like, and complex.

**Nan:** Maybe the narrative is very subjective, even the needs of physical and organ.

**Hai:** Actually if you think it closely, history is a kind of narrative, which is very subjective, it limited by the knowledge, perspective and experience of the person who writes it. Therefore, there is no objectivity at all.

**Nan:** In a lecture I heard one artist say one sentence, that impressive me: "History can be changed, but the future is certain." In fact, history has been constantly written and rewritten and the current moment is writing the history. There is the history in our mind, it is the so-called memory, and the written history, writing it down, is the production of technology, because I feel that technology is produced and progressed for the human desire to record. Before I feel that the two things should be separated, the memory in the mind and the technical memory. The latter seems more objective, but in fact it is not. It became more complex synthesis.

**Hai:** I just remember that seeing a vlog that a girl was crying in front of camera while talking about how she lost all her date in her phone. She looked so sad, and it felt like people's relation to technical memory is so strong, because our memory and technical memory is highly integrated. I think we should also think about that because we will show in digital form this time, not live performances. So it is important to also consider the relationship between the camera and the body.

**Nan:** I have been also inspired by the way some bloggers express their bodies in their vlogs. I think the body at the moment of technological development is the cyber body. When the camera or mobile phone is regarded as an extension of the body, this cybernetic body has the ability to look back, as if it can see itself, like a separate being, and regard this body as the subject of creation.

**Hai:** It seems that technology and the internet have transformed people through a physical experience of being watched into a body that actively participates in and actively exhibits. Before, we often learnt about the others through documentaries or books, but this is actually second-hand information. We understand the subject from the perspective and standpoint of the filmmaker or writer. But now it's different. In TIKTOK, you can often see all kinds of people showing their bodies and lives autonomously. This kind of display is highly performative. Although it is the same body being watched, big changes have taken place.

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**Hai:** I have to think about that when I was in Istanbul, I saw bands of elderly people, playing in the restaurant. Often customers of the restaurant would order songs and sing together with them. It was very affectionate. And all the songs sounded very melancholy.



**Nan:** When you talk about melancholy, why do people like melancholic songs? This emotion must come from somewhere. It might be pretty much related to the emotional atmosphere of the society that people live in.

**Hai:** Yes, if I think about it, I realise, that most of the pop songs we listen to are expressing a kind of emotion that something has been lost and cannot be returned.

**Nan:** It seems that we are all mourning the past.

**Hai:** This might have something to do with this rapid social development. China has changed so much in the past few decades. This earth-shaking change is happening rapidly in every corner of the place, where we grew up. This change makes people have a nostalgic mentality. It seems that we always want to go back, but we can't go back anymore. This is also like the state of a ghost, the memory of the past is like a dead body, a state of unwillingness to leave.

**Nan:** The connection between the ghost and the body is very natural for us, and it is easier to understand. It is a kind of narrative that is accepted in the body, and this kind of ghost narrative is very widely circulated in the Asian context. And this thing is also related to the history we mentioned before. The history in our body is the state of ghost. I think this is also related to why we use pop music or more accurately use karaoke as we mentioned at the beginning. In fact, the system is similar, or consistent.

**Hai:** I watched a short film before, a Japanese horror movie are edited together with the narrative of Filipino immigrants illegally stranded in Japan. They mentioned an interesting word in the film, called "overstay". "Overstay" literally means that someone stayed too long, but this is actually also a ghost state. A friend asked me before, why do you believe in ghosts and not in God. I don't know how to explain it, but I always feel that this set of narratives about ghosts is more empathetic, and it seems that it is even melancholy. It seems to be more consistent with our historical temperament to some extent. Because about God, this set of rhetoric about the savior seems to be far away from our way of thinking.

**Nan:** This is actually a good way to describe our current state. As Chinese living abroad, we grew up in China, but received a lot of Western education and ideas. We are in a state of drifting away from the mainstream of China, but we also doesn't fully exist in western society - living like ghosts one could say.

**Hai:** I think our experience is individual, but also kind of universal for certain groups in a social environment. In the context of globalization, many people like us are far away from home for various reasons and many people will never go back again. So the state we express can be empathized by this group of people.



**Nan:** The personalization of our experience can also eliminate some of the symbolism of the East.

**Hai:** Yes, we are in the role of the others in western society. I wonder if this approach can also provide a new way to deal with the problem of how to see and empathize with the others. Emphasizing the differences between ethnic minorities and making direct political appeals are meaningful and powerful, but does it really help to accept and empathize with others? Or does it widen the distance. Music is the best way to connect people, so with this deep routed emotion, a more intuitive way to generate connections may also bring new possibilities to society.

**Nan:** Yes, we use the way of being watched, the way of being observed, we decide these by ourselves, instead of being watched passively.

