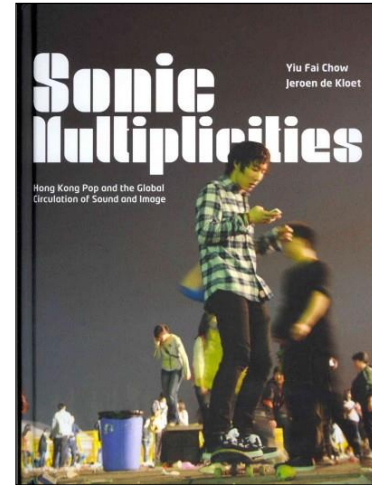


Yiu Fai Chow and Jeroen de Kloet, **Sonic Multiplicities: Hong Kong Pop and the Global Circulation of Sound and Image**, Bristol, UK/Chicago, IL: Intellect, 2013, 200 pp., \$60.00 (hardcover).

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Yiu Fai Chow and Jeroen de Kloet point out at the beginning of *Sonic Multiplicities: Hong Kong Pop and the Global Circulation of Sound and Image*, that only three English-language monographs concerning Chinese-language pop music were published in the last decade (p. 4). In comparison with monographs on Western popular music or on China's economy and politics, the figure is shocking, because Chinese-language pop scenes are rather lively and have generated massive cultural, social, and political influence on people's daily lives in the Greater China region. Thus, the publication of *Sonic Multiplicities* serves as an important call for more academic studies on Chinese popular music.



The heyday of Hong Kong pop has surely passed and been lamented by some people as if the handover in 1997 has perpetuated the political, economic, and cultural conflict between Hong Kong and mainland China. The conflict does exist, but it is necessary to understand the inseparable relationship between Hong Kong-in-China and China-in-Hong Kong (p. 8) and to situate Hong Kong pop in the context of transnational cooperation between musicians from Hong Kong, Taiwan, mainland China, Singapore, and the world at large. For example, Chow (the coauthor of the book) and Lin Xi are involved with the production of Chinese popular music related to the “Chinese Champion League” and the Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics.

There are four key words throughout the book that underscore the multiple aspects of Hong Kong pop. The first is “Chineseness.” Agreeing with some earlier studies, Chow and de Kloet argue that Hong Kong’s hybridity and “betweenness” form the true identity of the city; to deny this identity is to deny the history of Hong Kong. The handover of Hong Kong to Beijing authorities in 1997 may somewhat symbolize the “death” of Hong Kong pop, but as an influential hybrid culture where Chineseness meets and fuses with the West, the emphasis on locality is continuously advocated by Hong Kong citizens and artists like Chow himself. In this contradictory development of both losing and gaining the locality, Hong Kong pop has played a role in articulating the complicated relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China. Looking back on his lyrical engagement with the politics of Chineseness (Chapter 1), Chow offers an insider’s tale of how Hong Kong pop musicians challenge the music industry and compromise with it in cooperation with the mainland market. Comparing *Zhongguofeng* (*China Wind*) music videos from Hong Kong and those from Taiwan (Chapter 3), Chow and de Kloet question and analyze how Hong Kong artists defy and distance themselves from the hegemonic versions of Chineseness; their resistance helps to reconstitute the renationalization process in Hong Kong and in Greater China.

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The second key word is "locality." On the one hand, *Sonic Multiplicities* is a cultural geographical study focusing on Hong Kong—its pop fans, its *Zhongguofeng* music videos, the Edison Chen scandal, and the building of belonging and identity in those pop venues. All analyses are clearly situated within the context of Hong Kong, and the locality is a decisive factor in forming Hong Kong's pop culture. On the other hand, the book also has drawn a clear picture of how this Hong Kong pop culture is connected, contradicted, and fused with cultures from other locations, such as mainland China, Taiwan, and the Netherlands. It is vital to comprehend the context of translocal flows to appreciate the uniqueness of Hong Kong cultures. In other words, without understanding the transnational cultural web of Hong Kong and without accounting for the constant negotiation between Hong Kong and other localities, it is difficult to accept the mutations of Hong Kong cultures in relation to colonialism, capitalism, nationalism, and mainland communism.

The third key word is "visuals." Popular music is a performing art; visuals as texts provide a much bigger space and more flexibility to strengthen, recreate, or even distort the lyrical meaning of music. The hybrid culture of Hong Kong offers greater freedom to local musicians to express their ideologies and challenge the labels that may be applied to them by the industry, such as Leslie Cheung has done with an androgynous image and unusual stage performance. Visuals can be powerful in contrasting the different attitudes toward Chineseness in relation to those toward mainland China: for example, the religious ritual scene of "Don't Question the Heaven," performed by Tat Ming Pair, and the splendid visual journey of "Yellow People," performed by Nicholas Tse (Chapter 1). Visuals are also important in forming the bond between pop stars and their fans: for instance, the comparison of Marco Borsato's ordinary guy image and Leon Lai's polished, trendy, and sexy look (Chapter 2). Visuals are employed to destabilize and feminize Chineseness (Chapter 3). Singer-actor-celebrity Edison Chen caused moral panic when photos of his sexual escapades were made public in 2008, but he then used visual arts to retaliate in his solo exhibition titled "I hate you for looking" (Chapter 4). To develop her music career, Diana Zhu, a young Dutch-Chinese performer, had to slim down to a little over 40 kg (from 60–70 kg) to achieve the "right" image (Chapter 7). The issue of how she looked was thus political, cultural, and commercial in the negotiation of her identity. The visual impact of Hong Kong pop highlights the unique image, taste, attitude, and identity of the city itself.

The fourth key word is "personal." Given Chow's personal involvement with the Hong Kong music industry and de Kloet's continuous research on Chinese popular music in the past two decades, *Sonic Multiplicities* is like a wonderful combination of an academic monograph and a personal memoir, which offers a unique angle to review, rethink, and reexamine the multiple aspects of Hong Kong pop and culture. Borrowing from Lash and Lury's (2007) method of "following the object," Chow and de Kloet employ the method of "following the person" to study how Diana Zhu had to renegotiate her identity in terms of language, music, and body. Excepting the Edison Chen scandal (Chapter 4), the personal connection between the two authors, especially Chow, and the subjects being studied is close. This familiarity may risk somewhat the objectivity of their analyses, but it also empowers their arguments, as their biographies, engagements, and understanding of Hong Kong pop positions them between insider and outsider, between Hong Kong and mainland China, between the East and the West.

There are some unanswered questions in this book, as Chow and de Kloet have noted: for instance, the analysis of Chineseness in *Zhongguofeng* music videos (Chapter 3). If mainland *Zhongguofeng* music videos are also drawn into the discussion, will the comparison offer some interesting points to show how politics and popular music are engaged in different patterns in the mainland, in Hong Kong, and in Taiwan? For mainland Hong Kong pop fans, the Coliseum serves as a memory of their youth. Will this once cultural-belonging structure prompt contradictory memories between mainland and Hong Kong pop fans? Why, how, and in what ways? *Sonic Multiplicities* is an exciting read for anyone who is interested in Hong Kong pop, Chinese popular music, or Chinese popular culture in general.

References

Lash, S., & Lury, C. (2007). *Global culture industry: The mediation of things*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.