

Vincent Fang's Love Lyrics: A Poetic and Nostalgic Reconfiguration of Modern Concepts about Romantic Love

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Abstract Vincent Fang's love songs are a unique literary and cultural phenomenon in the contemporary Chinese media sphere. Fang critiques the habitualization and atomization of aesthetic appreciation evoked by contemporary popular lyrics. Employing Shklovsky's theory of defamiliarization, and through an in-depth textual analysis on Fang's lyrics, this paper finds that Fang's lyrics illustrate a process of defamiliarization, which utilizes ancient imagery, unconventional poetic forms and language. These thematic and linguistic innovations in Fang's lyrics reintroduce the traditional ideals of romantic love of the ancient Chinese people. They also challenge the beliefs held by contemporary Chinese music fans about love and romance, thus increasing the aesthetic value of contemporary Chinese love songs through resurrecting the ancient love traditions.

Key words popular lyric; poetic language; defamiliarization; aesthetic perception; nostalgic reconfiguration; love concepts

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Introduction

The aesthetic concept *ostranenie* (defamiliarization) was originally coined by the Russian literary critic Viktor Shklovsky in his essay "Art as Device" in

1919. The word *ostranenie* renders in English as estrangement, alienation and defamiliarization (Stacy 3). Shklovsky's groundbreaking proclamations about defamiliarization offered a theoretical foundation for the Russian formalism school. According to Shklovsky, the theory of defamiliarization is based on the obstruction between a routine reaction and a fresh observation, and between an automated appreciation and a novel cognizance. In other words, defamiliarization is opposite to the habitualization and automatization that causes one to encounter difficulty to see things or their textures because one reacts to them mechanically; it aggregates to a drastic aberration or variance in form and language from customary covenants (Cai 332-333).

Lawrence Crawford, vividly describes the nuances of Shklovsky's ideas on defamiliarization when he writes that:

From the outset Viktor Shklovsky's formulations of his theory of defamiliarization oppose life to death, the vital to the fossilized, created fullness to eroded emptiness, a graphic image to effacement and the empty algebraic symbol, aesthetic perception to habitual recognition, the lively force and beauty of a word at its coining to worn stereotype and dead metaphor. (Crawford 209)

There is a central theme in Shklovsky's theory of defamiliarization that emphasizes poetic language and imagery and its importance in guaranteeing the perceptual aura of the referent of language, and as a method of generating the deepest potential impression (Stacy 8-9). Moreover, perception serves the centre of aesthetic practise, which can only be recognized by prompting a textual alteration: to break down the apathetic identification of automatization (Crawford 210-211).

A number of literary critics and scholars, using Shklovsky's theory of defamiliarization, have examined classical and contemporary novels and other texts. Stacy conducted an in-depth reading of Russian texts by writers such as Leo Tolstoy and Frederick Buechner, in which he highlighted the "unfamiliar" technique of art that makes forms difficult and increases the difficulty and length of perception, as the course of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Mulvey uses the term "feminist formalism" to describe the defamiliarization in feminist films, which is based on the rejection of the past and caters to satisfy the complex shifts that feminist imagery desires. The splits in the cinematic sign allow ideas to interact with fiction and thought with fantasy, thus highlighting the linkage of Shklovsky's notion of defamiliarization to sexual description or possession (Naiman 338). Similarly, Hollinger (Hollinger 203) examines the involvement of science fiction in the processes of defamiliarization and notes that SF achieves a "cognitive estrangement" through its transposition of the social/political/cultural existent.

Besides these actualizations of the defamiliarization theory, this aesthetic notion has also been adopted to scrutinize Chinese fictional and creative narratives. The canon of defamiliarization also performs well as an inspiration for Chinese avant-garde writers (Cai 334). During the 1980s, some of these writers attempted to craft fictitious nonconformity as they felt that they were being threatened by the insensible veracity of language. For example, Yu Hua's novels generated a new sense of defamiliarization in narrative language and also an unexpected symbolic language that provoked the reader's "new perceptions and baffles or curbs the reader's automatic, habitualized linguistic recognition" (Cai 337).

In a similar manner, Zhang utilizes the defamiliarization theory to observe contemporary Chinese popular music, which persistently arouses people's interest and causes them listen to songs with a highly unusual rhetoric and rhythmical sensation.¹ The defamiliarization in pop lyrics is realized through inclusive presentation of mixtures of rhetorical schemes, integration of the lyrics with classical poetry, combination of lyrics with Beijing Opera and other art forms. Consequently, the original objects of perception become wonderful, both aurally and visually and the lyrists continually strive, by any means, to alter and re-order the semantics in order to create fresh impressions, and produce an unacquainted artistic effect.

Building on these experiments with defamiliarization theory in the literary and aesthetic field, this paper sets out to examine Taiwanese writer Vincent Fang's lyric creations. I will expose his attempts and intention of defamiliarization via linguistic and syntactic modification and thematic innovation. The paper will show the cosmic synchronization in the lyrics, as they mix with the temporal and spatial phenomena that reconfigure the concepts of modern love with ancient scenes, plots and characters. I will argue that Vincent Fang's lyric narratives are full of poetic perceptions which reinterpret the connotations of modern love under the rubric of ancient imagery, emotions and aesthetics. As a result, this reconfiguration of modern romantic love through the defamiliarization of contemporary popular lyrics enhances the aesthetic value of the modern lyrics and reintroduces the old-style ideas of love to contemporary music fans.

Vincent Fang and His Defamiliarization in Popular Love Lyric Creation

As a lyricist, Vincent Fang has become a cultural phenomenon who has attracted

1. See Zhang, Chunjing. "Grotesque and Gaudy World of Music, Indispensable Narrative Pen: Study on The Narrative Strategy of Modern Chinese Pop Songs." International Academic Workshop on social Science (IAW-SC 2013), 2013.

much attention from critics and scholars, both in Mainland China and Taiwan. Fang, who was born in Taiwan in 1969, is an enthusiastic admirer of traditional Chinese culture. He is best known for writing lyrics for some of Jay Chou's most popular songs, such as "Green Flower Porcelain" and "Chrysanthemum Flower Bed." Fang also writes lyrics for other popular singers.¹ The songs that were co-produced by Vincent Fang and Jay Chou have made a significant contribution to the "Chinese style" of music.² The so-called "Chinese style" of music combines lyrics that contain the quintessential elements of traditional poetry and ancient culture such as traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy with contemporary singing techniques and music composition (sometimes with components played on traditional Chinese musical instruments). This mixture of elements generates a nostalgic sentiment that is subtle, elegant and occasionally quite melancholic.

Vincent Fang's Chinese lyrics can be categorised into two types. One type depicts the ancient and authentic culture of China as displayed in martial arts, traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy, and in tea culture. The other type focuses on the traditional Chinese attitude towards love. The love aspect of Fang's lyrics employs a variety of traditional imagery and scenes to create images that are rich in nostalgic flavour and refined taste. Common imagery in Fang's love lyrics include a small bridge, flowing water, alcohol, bronze mirror, pipa (stringed Chinese lute), moon, chrysanthemum, attic, smoke from kitchen chimneys, willow, the setting sun, sanders, hair on the temples, old road, traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy and so on. These remote and out-dated images of old China are constantly utilised by Fang in his lyrical settings to create an illusion that challenges the habitual recognition and automated appreciation typically experienced by contemporary music lovers.

Apart from the extensive inclusion of traditional elements, Vincent Fang's lyrics also introduce a unique style of poetry that resists normative semantic rules. Fang's lyrics are akin to modern poetry, however, his lyrical poetry has parallels with *ci* verse of the Song Dynasty. The origin of the Song *ci* verse stems from the popular lyrics sung by the commoners of the Song Dynasty. However, when

1 Jay Chou was born in Taiwan and is one of the most popular music composers and singers in the sinophone music world. Some of the co-produced songs of Fang and Chou are representative of Chinese style music, a genre which has become a cultural sensation in both Taiwan and Mainland China.

2 Chinese Style music has long been an established music subgenre in popular music of the Chinese language speaking world, however, it was the combination of Jay Chou's music composition and Vincent Fang's lyric writing that pushed the trend to an unprecedented peak of popularity.

scholars attempted to re-create the lyrics, they refined the wording and expressions of these popular songs and wrote the lyrics as poetry so that it could both be sung as a song and read as a poem. The subtlety and gracefulness of these lyrics encapsulates the essence of Song *ci* poetry.

Fang's unique style of poetic lyrics directly translates to "plain face verse with an end rhyme." "Plain face" suggests there are no punctuations, numbers, or foreign words or phrases in his verse, and "an end rhyme" refers to a rhyming scheme whereby only the end character of each sentence of the verse rhymes (Fang). In contrast to traditional Tang Dynasty poetry and Song Dynasty *ci* verse, Fang's contemporary style of poetry does not follow the established convention of versification in that he does not use a specific combination of rhyming schemes or meters. However, through the utilisation of traditional scenes and imagery, Fang's writing still bears the essence of ancient Chinese poetry, as his descriptions conjure up images that are delicate and cultured despite being written in vernacular Chinese.

Fang also violates the established rules of Chinese syntax and grammar to create an impressive and vivid style of description. A discernible feature is its ambiguity. It displays the vigorous dynamism and exquisiteness of words while prolonging the process of perception. For example, he would frequently use an adjective as a verb, such as in "你发如雪 凄美了别离"(Your moonlit hairs, white as snow outshine the picture of our parting in woe). The direct translation of "凄美, qimei" is poignant (an adjective), however, in the context of this poem, it bears the meaning of "to outshine" (a verb). This is only one example of how Fang challenges the regular usage of words. He is also competent at making use of synaesthesia to express feelings, such as in "垂钓你的微笑" (to angling your smile). Furthermore, Fang uses inversion to emphasise imagery or impression, such as in "如传世的青花瓷自顾自美丽 你眼带笑意" (Just like the antique and beautiful blue and white porcelain enjoying itself, your eyes are smiling). These unconventional but intriguing methods of expressive forms in Fang's lyrics produce a radical variation in usage and language that sets them apart from regular convention, and replaces stereotype and dull descriptive patterns with a semantic image which is rich and vital.

The ancient and authentic Chinese cultural imagery that is conveyed by Vincent Fang's unconventional use of language in his lyrics paints a vivid picture for the audiences. One of the most distinguishable features of traditional Chinese poetry is its assimilation of painting and poetry. The great Tang Dynasty poet Wang Wei's poems have been described by critics as there is painting in his poetry, which is meant to suggest that the poems are full of graphic description and are written

with poetic grace. Similarly, Fang's vivid use of imagery and language makes his lyrics impressive and emotionally stirring.

Vincent Fang's lyrical innovations and his penchant to violate established semantic conventions allow him to create a unique approach to writing popular love song lyrics that are widely recognised and appreciated. The following section examines the themes, plots, scenes and imagery of Fang's lyrics. His main focus is on the concepts and sentiments evoked by romantic love, such as missing, waiting, departing, and distress. I argue that Fang's reconfiguration of the ideal and ideas of modern romantic love, by his implementation of cosmic synchronization, defamiliarization and nostalgia, generates unfathomable perceptions, which enriches the aesthetic significance of the modern lyrics as it serves as an outlet to resurrect the elegant and subtle traditional concepts of romantic love.

The Poetic and Nostalgic Reconfiguration of Modern Love Concepts in Vincent Fang's Lyric Creations

“千里之外” (Thousand Miles Distant): Farewell

Farewell is one of the eternal themes in Chinese literature, both traditional and contemporary. Consequently, ancient and modern Chinese writers have frequently used farewell as a thematic topic in poems and lyrics. In ancient China, farewell is always juxtaposed with melancholy and full of subtlety, as when two friends or a couple bid farewell to each other. For example, in the Song Dynasty *ci* verse “雨霖铃” (Bells Ringing in the Rain) by Liu Yong, the verse goes,

... 执手相看泪眼 竟无语凝噎 ... 多情自古伤离别 更那堪 冷落清秋节 今宵酒醒何处 杨柳岸 晓风残月 !¹

...Hand in hand, we gaze at each other's tearful eyes/And burst into sobs with words congealed on our lips./...Parting lovers would grieve as of old./How could I stand this clear autumn day so cold!/Where shall I be found at day's early break/From wine awake?/Moored by a riverbank planted with willow trees/Beneath the waning moon and in the morning breeze....

In this traditional poem by Liu Yong, the parting scene between two lovers is full of melancholy. Their mood is sombre, and while holding hands they cannot help but shed tears — they are rendered speechless. The narrative of the verse then shifts

¹ Translation of the excerpt of the poem by Xu Yuanchong, available at <http://www.en8848.com.cn/fanyi/sx/gsc/135262.html>.

to the internal feelings of the male lover as he reveals the depressing situation that he will endure after the departure of the boat and his true love. Here, autumn, a riverbank planted with willow trees, and a withering moon, are images employed to emphasize his sorrow. Autumn, willow and withering moon were typical signifiers in classical Chinese poetry to symbolize departure and regret. Thus, this poetry creates an overall scene of delicate melancholy.

However, departing from, and in contrast to the traditions of ancient China, in contemporary Chinese popular lyrics, farewell is most often demonstrated in the dramatic emotion and behavior of the lovers. An example of this may be seen in, some lyrics about farewell from Hong Kongese singer Jacky Cheung's "吻别" (Kiss Goodbye, lyric by He Qihong).

我的世界开始下雪	My world starts to snow
冷得让我无法多爱一天	Which is too cold for me to keep loving you
冷得连隐藏的遗憾都那么地明显	the coldness made the hidden regret obvious
我和你吻别在无人的街	We kiss goodbye on a street without people
让风痴笑我不能拒绝	I can not refuse the laugh of the wind
我和你吻别在狂乱的夜	We kiss goodbye at a wild night
我的心等著迎接伤悲	My heart is waiting for sadness to come ¹

These lyrics from a contemporary Sinophone music world evoke the standard humdrum response and mechanized appreciation from the audience who live in a highly modernized and fast-paced society. These types of lyrics reduce the length and strength of the process of artistic perception, and downgrade the aesthetic elegance of farewell as an eternal theme of artistic connoisseurship. In order to counter these "normal attitudes," Vincent Fang's "Qianlizhiwai" (Thousand Miles Distant), offers renewed reflection and a fresh cognizance through depicting ancient scenes and imagery of farewell which provide a nostalgic sentiment.

屋檐如悬崖 风铃如沧海 我等燕归来	Eaves high, bell rings, I await you day and night
时间被安排 演一场意外 你悄然走开	It happened that you left me quietly
故事在城外 浓雾散不开 看不清对白	Town's dimness chokes the passion in our eyes
你听不出来 风声不存在 是我在感慨	My sighs you took to be the blowing wind
梦醒来是谁在窗台把结局打开	Our fate unveiled after my dreams took flight
那薄如蝉翼的未来经不起谁来拆	I fear for the future without you to hold me tight
我送你离开千里之外你无声黑白	Farewell, my girl, though you didn't say goodbye

1 Translation of the excerpt of the lyric from Chinese to English is my own.

沉默年代或许不该太遥远的相爱	The distance between us drives eternity from sight
我送你离开天涯之外你是否还在	Farewell, my girl, will you wait for me
琴声何来生死难猜用一生去等待	Our eternal parting echoed in a distant melody ¹

In the above excerpt from “Thousand Miles Distant”, the grief and regretful mood depicted in the scene of farewell is conveyed by the ancient imagery such as old-style eaves, and a city in dense fog which blurs the sight line of the lovers. The sound of chimes and music played on ancient musical instruments overwhelms the sighing of the characters. These detailed depictions of scenes and images of ancient China block the habitual recognition of the contemporary audience and generate novel aesthetic perception. In addition, Fang employs synaesthesia to make his portrayal of the plots and scenes more vibrant and rich, such as “silent times” and “perform a scene of accident,” which replace the stereotypical formalized modern sketch.

He also uses the sound of the wind as a metaphor of sighing, and the thinness of cicada's wings is employed to denote the unforeseeable and uncertain destiny of the lovers. These type of word schemes denote the imaginative power of Fang's language and reveal the animated potency and attraction of his unique poetic lyrics. In the lyrics of the song, the male lover hints that he will wait for the girl for the rest of his life, and in this way, Fang highlights the perseverance and deeper meaning of love that was more popular among the ancient people than by contemporary Chinese who treat love relationships like fast-food and adopt a materialistic and pragmatic outlook towards it. In summary, in “Thousand Miles Distant,” Fang creates a gentle, elegant, and melancholic lover who is immersed in an old-style love story that is in obvious contrast with the viewpoints on love harbored by present-day Chinese people. In his defamiliarization of the departing act in the lyrics, Fang reinstates the time-honored love ideals of traditional China.

“发如雪” Hair White as Snow: Waiting

Waiting is another typical and enduring theme in traditional and modern Chinese literature, and was found, for example, in the boudoir-plaint poetry genre that was popular in ancient China, and which reached its peak in Tang Dynasty poetry, and also in Song Dynasty *ci* verse works, as mentioned above. In ancient China, to be waiting for their lover or husband when they were away, was common for females. The reasons for their absence were many but being absent for study, or serving the

¹ English translation by anonymous author, available at http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_3f2b58cb01000dcy.html.

country as government official or soldier was common. The boudoir-plaint poetry subgenre specifically focuses on delineating the longing and missing of the women for their partners.

It is interesting to note that in ancient China the majority of boudoir-plaint poetry was written by male poets. Therefore, this particular poetry subgenre not only depicts the anxious and bored women waiting, but also it expresses the male writers' longing for love and their expectations of a devoted woman with a sense of high morality. In their poems, the (always) male literati made the ideal woman a loyal person who would remain chaste while their lover or husband was away, and in this way the poetry reinforced the tradition of the steadfast waiting of the woman in ancient China. However, in "Hair White as Snow," Fang reverses the subject of waiting from woman to man, and through the male's determined and timeless waiting for the girl he loves, his infatuation and faith in his love is highlighted. Inspired by this old-style love concept embodied by waiting in traditional poetry, Fang chases ageless and faithful love in his lyric narratives, in contrast to the fickle and impatient notion of love that he sees in contemporary Chinese lovers.

纵然青史已经成灰	Should annals of history turn to dust
我爱不灭	Still my love would be burning and never rust.
繁华如三千东流水	Of thousands of waters bustling to East,
我只取一瓢爱了解	I take one scoop of love to taste,
只恋你化身的蝶	Obsessed with the butterfly/ Fluttering from your fairy life.
你发如雪	Your hair's now as white as snow.
纷飞了眼泪	Alas! My tears endlessly flow.
我等待苍老了谁	Has my lifetime wait/worn away my own youth / or furrowed your face, or both?
红尘醉微醺的岁月	In the tipsy mundane world/Days reel along.
我用无悔 刻永世爱你的碑	Nothing can erase my love word /I engrave on the stele for long.
铜镜映无邪 扎马尾 /	The bronze mirror revived your naive trail/ As you were bunching a ponytail.
你若撒野	
今生我把酒奉陪	My dear, play spoiled as you please./ I'd keep you company this life, wining at ease! ¹

Two particular lines included in the above excerpt of "Hair White as Snow," "Of thousands of waters bustling to East, I take one scoop of love to taste" (繁华如

1 English translation by anonymous author, available at <http://www.en8848.com.cn/fanyi/sx/gecihy/135428.html>.

三千东流水，我只取一瓢爱了解)，best describe Fang's pursuit of the notion of an undying love. These two lines are essentially Fang's adaptation of words by Jia Baoyu, the lead male character in “红楼梦” (Dreams of the Red Chamber), written by Qing Dynasty literati Cao Xueqin. In one scene of Cao's novel, when the female lead character Lin Daiyu tests her lover Jia Baoyu's loyalty to her, Baoyu replies with, “Of thousands of waters bustling, I only take one scoop to drink” (任凭弱水三千，我只取一瓢饮), which means you are the only for me in this multifarious world. Also, in the well-known love story between the West Han Dynasty scholar and literati Sima Xiangru and his wife Zhuo Wenjun, (who was also a talented person), when Zhuo Wenjun knew that Sima Xiangru intended to leave her for another woman, she wrote a poem “白头吟” (Till Old) to persuade her husband to change his mind. In the poem, she writes, “May a faithful man come I pray, so that until old we can stay” (愿得一心人，白头不相离). It is obvious here that Vincent Fang is fond of ideas of traditional love that were pursued by the ancient Chinese people, ideas such as constancy in love, loyalty to ones lover, and a steadfast relationship based on pure love.

In contemporary Chinese love lyrics, waiting is not typically adopted as a signifier of the infinite nature of love, of loyalty, nor of unflinching love. Instead it is more related with change and heartlessness, as exemplified in Taiwanese singer Rene Liu's song “我等你” (I will Wait for You, lyrics by Rui Ye).

我等你 半年为期	I will wait for you, and half year is the deadline
逾期就狠狠把你忘记	If you exceed the time limit, I will forget you unfeelingly
不只伤心的 还包括一切甜蜜	Not only those sad memory, but also the sweet ones
要等你 要证明自己	I will wait for you and prove myself
我可以纵容你在心底	I could indulge you in my heart
也可以当你只是路过的人而已	I also could take you as just a passerby ¹

Compared to Fang's understanding of waiting (for his/her lover), the lyrics above reveal a divergent attitude towards “waiting” within the context of love. It not only sets a time limit to the waiting, but also it takes waiting as a media to prove ones capacity of forgetting, which takes on a flavor of revenge. Thus, waiting in both the ancient and Fang's lexicon of love, refers to something eternal and loyal, however, in contemporary popular songs, it catches a taste of callousness, revenge, and amnesia. In Fang's ideals of the everlasting pursuit of love, an ideal that is identical

1 Translation of the excerpt of the lyric from Chinese to English is my own.

to the ancient ideals of love, and which overcomes the disappearance of history, he tries to revive the decreasing belief in true, timeless love.

In “Hair White as Snow,” traditional imagery and scene are ubiquitous. Take for example the butterfly lovers, imagery which is derived from an ancient legend of two lovers who become butterflies - the notion of being together after death; drinking alcohol to drown one’s sorrows; image of the pretty and lively girl reflected in the bronze mirror; and the stele engraved with words of love. Relying on the process of defamiliarization, during which the contemporary settings and imagery are replaced by old images and plots, Fang creates a primordial artistic conception that is full of vivacity, taste, and graphic images. Through cosmic synchronization in the lyric, which reconfigures the situation of modern love affection with ancient scenes, characters and notions, Fang intelligently instills the old-fashioned ideas of love into the popular lyrics, which are then consumed by contemporary music fans.

In the lyric of “Hair White as Snow,” Fang continues with his unconventional usage of semantics. For example, there are flexible and creative uses of verbs and adjectives, such as in “我等待苍老了谁” (Has my lifetime waiting worn away my own youth, or furrowed your face, or both?). “苍老,” literally means “hoary and old” (an adjective), however, in the language setting of this poem, its meaning is “to wear out” (a verb); moreover, synaesthesia and inversion also appear in the lyrics, such as, “I take one scoop of love to taste” and “纷飞了眼泪” (direct translation from Chinese to English should be “endlessly flow my tears”). These disruptions of the proven rubrics of Chinese language produce an imposing and garish panache of account, which exhibits the robust enthusiasm and daintiness of verses and encouragingly protracts the procedure of aesthetic perception.

“青花瓷” Green Flower Porcelain: Missing

Missing, is the most definitive subject of love stories, and is heavily represented in Chinese literary and artistic creations. In ancient China, literati sometimes employ symbols to convey the emotion of “missing” such as “red bean,” in the Tang Dynasty poet Wang Wei’s poem “红豆” (Red Bean).

红豆生南国， Pick you may the red beans of southland.
 春来发几枝。 Spring shall not see much of their growth.
 愿君多采撷， Pick you may, and pick many a full hand,
 此物最相思。 for they are the very token of a lovers’ anguish.¹

1 English translation by Wu Xinghua, available at http://www.360doc.com/content/06/10/28/15/13441_243373.shtml.

In another Tang Dynasty poem by Cui Hu, “题都城南庄,” (Writing in the Village South of the Capital), the sadness of their separation is expressed so:

去年今日此门中，	A whole year ago to the gate I did pace
人面桃花相映红。	With blooming peaches shining upon her face
人面不知何处去，	Now the smiling face which I saw and miss has gone nowhere
桃花依旧笑春风。	The peaches are still coming into bloom in spring breeze here ¹

In this poem, the poet's yearning for the girl he met by chance in a village south of the capital is reflected in his memory of her beautiful and smiling face. The poet does not directly hint at his longing for the girl, however, his sadness of not seeing the girl again this year is vividly portrayed in the poem. Contrary to the delicate and beautiful depiction about craving in traditional poems, the contemporary representation of missing (one's lover) in popular lyrics reflects the manner and taste of the present-day Chinese, which is more drastic and direct. For example, in Hong Kong based singer Faye Wong's song “我愿意” (I Will), she sings:

思念是一种很玄的东西	Hard to describe is the missing of you,
如影随行	following like a shadow.
无声又无息出没在心底	Deep in hush it haunts my mind,
转眼吞没我在寂寞里	reducing me to a lonely fellow.
我无力抗拒特别是夜里	At night especially,
想你到无法呼吸	I resist only to miss you too much to breathe.
恨不能立即朝你狂奔去	In no time, I would die to fly to you
大声的告诉你	just to let you know:
我愿意为你 我愿意为你	I will, really will,
我愿意为你 忘记我姓名	warmly will, forget myself for you. ²

In contrast to the refined and implied way of describing the sentiment of “missing” practiced by the ancient people, contemporary Chinese are more open in voicing their feelings in order to show their emotions. This seems a more desperate and vigorous way of expression, which has lost the subtleness and lingering charm of “missing” as actually felt by lovers. Similar to drinking tea, the flavor and taste of

1 English translation by anonymous author, available at <http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-english-77831-1.shtml>.

2 Translation of the excerpt of the lyric from Chinese to English is my own.

“missing” and “love” should be savored and enjoyed slowly and patiently, allowing the complete essence and taste to be felt and appreciated by the lovers. However, to swallow the whole thing down in a gulp, in the drastic and fast-paced transmission of emotion, will, to certain degree, destroy the deeper and more nuanced feeling transmitted by images of “missing” one’s lover, as “the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” (Stacy 12).

In Vincent Fang’s “Green Flower Porcelain,” he reaches out and grasps the exquisite and meticulous feelings between the lovers. For example, the first sentence, “Green flower appears on the ware and carving getting weak,” could be read as a metaphor of the pure, fresh, simple and elegant appearance of the girl. In another line, “sandalwood flying through the window,” the thoughts of the man who is dearly missing and waiting are symbolized, and in “peony on the porcelain” the reader is reminded of the girl’s dressing and the bud of the girl’s smile, and the half-finished drawing on the porcelain reveals the fixation of the man’s mind which is fully occupied by the yearning for the beautiful girl who seems beyond his reach. The sudden disappearance of the girl’s prettiness disturbs the tranquillity of the scene and shows the worries and disappointment of the man. In this way, the full taste of love is savoured and appreciated.

素胚勾勒出青花笔锋浓转淡	Green flower appears on the ware and carving getting weak
瓶身描绘的牡丹一如你初妆	The peony on the porcelain just like your dressing
冉冉檀香透过窗心事我了然	Sandalwood flying through the window and know what I think
宣纸上走笔至此搁一半	The drawing of the porcelain is now just half finished
釉色渲染仕女图韵味被私藏	Belle painting painted by the glaze and charm is hid
而你嫣然的一笑如含苞待放	But your smile just like the bud
你的美一缕飘散去到我 去不	Your beauty has gone to the place which I can’t touch
了的地方	
...	
天青色等烟雨而我在等你	The blue sky is waiting for the rain and I am waiting for you
月色被打捞起晕开了结局	The moonlight is netted and the sequel is unveiled
如传世的青花瓷自顾自美	Just like the antique and beautiful green flower porcelain
丽你眼带笑意	enjoying itself, your eyes are smiling ¹

By employing these images and cultural scenes in a rich traditional flavour and with aesthetic images such as the green flower porcelain, belle painting, and

1 English translation by anonymous author, available at <http://edu.qq.com/a/20090803/000070.htm>.

sandalwood, and combining them with his specific way of constructing vernacular language, Fang depicts vividly the deep emotion of “missing” in the heart of the male character. This deep feeling of “missing” is conveyed through his imagination and delusion about the girl, and by juxtaposing the image and smile of the girl with traditional Chinese painting on the porcelain, which are depicted lusciously and poignantly in his unconventional usage of syntax and grammar. For example, Fang uses inversion in lines, “Just like the antique and beautiful green flower porcelain enjoying itself, your eyes are smiling,” and he uses synaesthesia in the line, “The moonlight is netted and the sequel is unveiled.” In this way, Fang not only distances the contemporary music audience from their modern living environment by transporting them to ancient times and settings, but he also delays and prolongs their process of perception of the artistic conception created by the lyrics via sweeping modification in language form from the covenants they are accustomed to. This combined effort of defamiliarization engenders the earnest latent impression of Fang’s lyrics.

“葬花笛” Flower Burying Flute: Nostalgia

There is a unique thematic topic in traditional Chinese writing, which is to commemorate one’s dead friend or relative, in particular one’s spouse. For example, the well-known Song Dynasty poet, Su Shi’s poem “江城子” (In Memory of My Dead Wife), which is translated by Burton Watson,

十年生死两茫茫，	Ten years, dead and living dim and draw apart.
不思量，	I don’t try to remember,
自难忘。	But forgetting is hard.
千里孤坟，	Lonely grave a thousand miles off,
无处话凄凉。	Cold thoughts, where can I talk them out?
纵使相逢应不识，	Even if we met, you wouldn’t know me,
尘满面，	Dust on my face,
鬓如霜。	Hair like frost.
夜来幽梦忽还乡，	In a dream last night suddenly I was home.
小轩窗，	By the window of the little room,
正梳妆。	You were combing your hair and making up.
相顾无言，	You turned and looked, not speaking,
唯有泪千行。	Only lines of tears coursing down. ¹

1 English translation by Burton Watson, available at http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_6252b0b-b0100rxg0.html.

Another poem by the famous Song Dynasty female poet Li Qingzhao, “武陵春” (Spring in Peach-Blossom Land), expresses her sadness upon losing her beloved husband, and to memorize him, she wrote:

风住尘香花已尽，	Sweet flowers fall to dust when winds abate;
天晚倦梳头。	Tired, I won't comb my hair although it's late.
物是人非事事休。	Things are the same, but he's no more and all is over.
欲语泪先流。	Before I speak, how can my tears not pour!
闻说双溪春尚好，	It's said at Twin Creek spring is not yet gone;
也拟泛轻舟。	In a light boat I long to float thereon.
只恐双溪舴艋舟，	But I'm afraid the grief-overloaden boat
载不动许多愁。	Upon twin Creek can't keep afloat. ¹

Also, in the poem “离思” (Missing Incurred by Farewell) Tang Dynasty literati Yuan Zhen wrote for his dead wife:

曾经沧海难为水，	The blue sea makes all other waters unworthy of the name,
除却巫山不是云。	After Wushan, all other clouds are mere puffballs above; ²

In all three above-mentioned poems, the writers express their deep feelings and cravings for their dead wife or husband. In Su Shi's poem, he depicts a dream he had where he and his dead wife are reunited, and both of them are overcome with emotion. This poem reveals Su Shi's immersion in the memory of his wife who had passed away more than ten years ago, and indicates that the poet has deep emotions and affections towards his wife. Similarly, in Li Qingzhao's case, after the death of her husband, she was no longer interested in paying attention to her appearance or in going out as her heart was very much burdened by the loss of him and the pleasant memories they shared with each other. The verse Yuan Zhen wrote for his wife is a metaphor which means once having seen the best, the rest is not worthwhile considering. And in his actual life, Yuan Zhen remained single for the rest of his life after the death of his wife, although he did develop a short-term relationship with a famous female poet, Xue Tao.

1 English translation by anonymous author, available at http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_467c84720100gtuz.html.

2 English translation by anonymous author, available at <http://zhidao.baidu.com/question/166580097.html>.

This nostalgia towards the forever-bygone past and the dead spouse reflected in the traditional poetry and narratives is disappearing from the lyrics of contemporary popular songs, perhaps due to its sad themes and tones. However, this lingering emotion about passed-away lovers signifies an immersion and infatuation in love which is not often seen in modern love relationships. The heavy emotions of ancient people are replaced by the lightheartedness and carefree sentiments of the contemporary people. However, several of Vincent Fang's love lyrics point to a remembering of loved-ones long gone. He almost single-mindedly endeavours to revive this old style yearning towards the bygone beloved ones and the once-shared memories, thus revealing his passion for nostalgia.

For example, in "Flower Burying Flute," Fang seems to use the act of burying flowers as a metaphor to depict the feeling of a husband towards his dead wife, an act which is full of deep affection. The lyrics, "I bury the flowers, which is my oath to you, and you are my lawfully wedded wife in this life," indicates that the bygone wife is the most important woman in his life and she is everlasting and he will never forget her. Being constant in love and cherishing unchanging love is a desirable character of a man by many women, however, there are more and more contemporary men who feel easy with changing affections and do not take love relationships seriously. Therefore, the yearning for the recently passed-away wife of the ancient man is employed by Fang in his love lyrics to remind the contemporary people of a traditional way of love which focusses on constancy and eternity. This defamiliarization in theme that is realized through Fang's poetic and innovative lyrics provides a fresh observation and novel cognizance towards the habitualization and atomization of routines and beliefs about love relationship which has been mechanically practiced by contemporary Chinese people who have gradually lost their understanding of true romantic love in this fast-paced pragmatic world.

我葬花祭 如埋誓語	Burying flowers like burying my vow to you
今生你是 我結髮的妻	For this life, you are my wife-in-law,
懸崖邊的菊	chrysanthemum on the cliff edges
我葬花祭 如埋誓語	Burying flowers like burying my vow to you
一切緣起 只為愛上妳	All because I fall in love with your eternal beauty
永世的美麗	
窗外雨洗 極淺極淡的妳	Rains pouring outside and you are so innocent and pure
原來曾愛過的回憶 抹不去	And the memory of our love can never be erased ¹

1 Translation of the excerpt of the lyric from Chinese to English is my own.

Conclusion

Vincent Fang uses a process of defamiliarization by utilizing ancient imagery, unconventional semantic forms and poetic language. In doing so, he deconstructs the habitualization and atomization of aesthetic appreciation evoked by contemporary popular lyrics to its audience. Through manufacturing renewed reflection, and original cognizance through his unique poetic lyrics, Fang challenges the rigid, mechanical reactions that music fans routinely experience when listening to contemporary pop songs. Fang embeds his lyrics with vitality, graphic images and rich artistic perception which generate the deepest potential impression to the audience.

In this in-depth textual analysis of the representative works of Fang's lyric creations, and in particular the love themed pieces, this paper concludes that a defamiliarization procedure occurs during the course of cosmic synchronization. Fang successfully adjusts the temporal and spatial coordinates and describes the love scenes, plots and characters in the ancient times and settings. Consequently, these thematic and linguistic innovations in Fang's works distances and defamiliarizes the contemporary audience from their routinely acquainted life experiences and conversant language usages, and he manages to delay and prolong the process of artistic perception and aesthetic appreciation. This delay is essential to art appreciation according to Shklovsky and his similarly minded peers. In this way, Fang reintroduces the time-honored ideals of love as understood by ancient Chinese in his love song lyrics. He reconfigures the mindset of contemporary Chinese music fans about their beliefs of romantic love which enhances the aesthetic value of contemporary love themed lyrics and sublimates the old-style notions about love.

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