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## **The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies**

Bull Michael

### **Diaspora as method, music as hope**

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Chow Yiu Fai

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DIASPORA AS METHOD,  
MUSIC AS HOPE*Yiu Fai Chow*

In November 2013, something unusual happened during the television show *Holland's Got Talent*. To begin with, a person with a Chinese background participated in a talent show dominated by white, and to a lesser extent, black bodies. After Wang Xiao, a Chinese research student in the Netherlands, finished his performance, he was greeted with a laughing articulation of “surprise” by a jury member Gordon, a white Dutch singer.<sup>1</sup> The articulation, a stereotyping reference to the presumed Chinese difficulty to pronounce the “r” sound, was followed by more racist remarks, including the most cited “Which number are you singing? Number 39 with rice?”<sup>2</sup>

While Gordon tries to defend himself against national and international critique by qualifying his remarks as “jokes”, the incident lays bare not only the everyday racism in Dutch society (Essed and Hoving 2015), but also one key understanding in sound studies that this chapter seeks to tease out: sound in its configuration with our social experience, community, our relational experience, and power (Bull and Back 2003: 4). In other words, inasmuch as our ears are supposed to stay open, hence indiscriminate and democratic to the outside world (unlike other senses, for instance, our eyes), hearing, and by extension the voice or sound that wants to be heard, is always already a matter of “positionality” (Sterne 2012: 4). In his position in the Dutch racial majority, Gordon does not hear Wang sing – his ears are tuned to the sound the Chinese are wont to make, presumably: the funny mispronunciations and the take-away utterances. As a member of the Chinese diaspora, like it or not, Wang needs to try very hard not to be relegated to the place where he is supposed to be (the catering business), and to claim his position to sing, to be heard. The Chinese diaspora is particularly disadvantaged in this case as they are generally not known for their musical talents. Think of black diaspora, their assumed musical DNA and heritage, and thus their radically different and vantage position in the world of music. More succinctly put, our ears accommodate, but our hearing discriminates.

This chapter is about the diaspora and the politics of being heard, or, to paraphrase Stuart Hall, the war of auditory positions (Hall 1996). And my focus will be on the Chinese case of popular music. To state the obvious as a caveat, diasporic auditory culture is not and should not be confined to popular music, or music, for that matter. However, given my own research experience and the bulk of scholarship on diasporic (popular) music, rather than other forms of sound, I have chosen to orientate the chapter this way. I will first attempt an outline of the field and highlight its major trajectories: sense of belonging, hostland, music production, and

the location of the periphery. I will then use a case originated from the Chinese diaspora in the Netherlands not only as their explication; more importantly, I aim to posit some of the possible trajectories to take diasporic music studies further. I plead for hope, for (imagined) homeland, for more than music and for gender. The case I have been following is a Dutch-Chinese girl, 15 when we first met, in Amsterdam, almost 26 by the time I penned this chapter, a professional singer moving from her Dutch hometown to Shanghai, by way of Hong Kong, then based in Taipei. I will end the chapter by questioning the field of diasporic studies with technological developments, with the intersectional perspective, and finally the limits of the field itself.

### Triangulating music with time and place

Originally referring to the dispersal of Jewish people from Palestine around 70 C.E. and subsequently to that of other populations (Vertovec 1997), diaspora, as I argue elsewhere, is always already “embedded in metaphors of scattering and displacement” and diasporic experience “conceptualized as living between homeland and hostland, and valorized from such metaphors to an archetype of identity negotiation, community construction and potential resistance” (Chow 2011: 787). The complex interplay and identification between “where you are from” and “where you are at” underwrites the two key terms in diasporic inquiries: roots and routes (Gilroy 1993; Clifford 1997). For all its hybridity and difference, diaspora subverts the kind of boundary formulation, particularly the nationalistic, that is fixating and assimilating, tilting towards “the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity” (Hall 1990: 235). Particularly influential and relevant for our purposes here is Paul Gilroy’s seminal book on the African diaspora where music, in this case black music and its aesthetics as well as circulation, is inserted to triangulate with place and time, to understand the dynamics and politics between there and here, between then and now (Gilroy 1987).

The coupling of diaspora and music continues. In an overview article on diaspora and music, Thomas Solomon tracks the increasing attention music scholars have given to the concept of diaspora since 1990s, to the extent that diaspora is “firmly established as a paradigm for music research” (Solomon 2015: 202). Solomon’s article is in turn a confirmation and continuation of what Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh observe fifteen years earlier. Against a backdrop of ethnomusicology and its preference for “traditional musics” as object of study, the authors note that “it is diasporic music that has moved to the centre of attention” (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000: 25). This paradigm shift is a challenging move. In her introduction to a special issue on musical performances in the diaspora, Tina K. Ramnarine flags up the key words of diaspora – “difference”, “otherness”, “hybridity”, and so forth – that challenge ethnomusicology’s “cherished presumptions about music mapped onto geographies and societies” (2007: 2–3). It punctures what Mark Slobin identifies in his overview article as the persistent and homogenizing model, or myth, of one society having one music (Slobin 2003), and its concomitant racial and cultural power structure as illustrated in the Gordon controversy mentioned earlier. In that sense, diasporic music is always already vocal, literally and metaphorically. The messiness, the complexity and the specificity of diasporic music-making are to find its political voice to question certain reified thinking on place and identity, that they are neat and tidy categories.<sup>3</sup>

Explaining the appeal of music to diasporic populations, and thus the emergence of diasporic music as a field of practices and inquiries, Solomon spotlights two reasons. On the one hand, music is fluid, extra-territorial, and “travels far and wide”, readily accessible and usable to the diaspora. On the other, music invites people to “pleasurable embodied experience and to communal sociability”, both of which resonate with those who oscillate and negotiate their sense of being between the homeland and the hostland (Solomon 2015: 205–6). These two reasons

correspond in turn to two major trajectories in the study of sound, namely the scientific and the technological, as well as the human and the experiential (Chow and Steintrager 2011). Focusing on the latter, Vic Seidler recalls his growing up experience with language and music in a migrant family, and foregrounds the importance of the study of diasporic sounds in the fundamental connection “between ‘being listened to’ and the notion that you are ‘being seen’ as a person in your own right” (2003: 401).

### **Doing diasporic music study**

In the following, I will explicate four major trajectories of doing diasporic music study. Needless to say, the list is more indicative than exhaustive, more crisscrossing than parallel.

#### ***Belonging***

Let’s start with Seidler’s autobiographical account, which is illustrative. It opens with a series of intimate memories of his Jewish mother (who had to flee Vienna from the Nazis) and himself (who grew up in the postwar Jewish refugee community *and* in north-west London), juxtaposing them with migratory experiences of some people the author knows. For Seidler music is what enables “outsiders” to “make ourselves at home” in the hostland (Seidler 2003: 403) – a kind of “social glue”, to borrow a metaphor (Vertovec 2004); but some other diasporic members, he notes, have no such urge to feel a sense of belonging to the hostland. The vexing issue of belonging, of identity, home, and community, as weaved in the fabric of diasporic experience and memory, informs the first trajectory of doing diasporic music study. Which, in turn, flows out from the abovementioned embodied experience and communal sociality that Solomon singles out.

Similarly, Angela Moran, in her book-length treatise on Irish music outside Ireland, structures her investigation around sites for Irish musical performance in Birmingham including churches, public houses, and concert halls (2012). Taking cues from Pierre Nora’s definition of such sites as “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (cited in Moran 2012: 8), Moran follows the Irish musical sound to these sites of music-making, probing, in the meantime, into the diasporic gamut of experience, memory, identity, and community, imbricating to the central issue of where one belongs.

#### ***Hostland***

How this issue of belonging is to be answered, how diasporic identities and communities are configured by their sounds, as Seidler’s account testifies, needs to be “specified historically and culturally” (2003: 403). But then the concern, put more elaborately, is not only *how* but also how one finds his place, his home, his very being in *where* he is at. Moving from the *how* to *where* diasporic music studies are situated, Seidler’s account also testifies to the primacy of the hostland; in his case, Britain, or London. Seidler is deliberating his and his fellow migrants’ experience in the context of Britain and London. Solomon, in his overview article theorizing diaspora and music, cites a series of studies, all of which take the hostland as their site of inquiry, including Turkish hip-hop in Berlin (Solomon 2009), *raï* music in Paris (Marranci 2003), and Portuguese music in Malaysia (Sarkissian 2002) – just like Moran’s study of Irish music in Birmingham.

This is what I would call the paradox of diasporic music studies. While the notion of diaspora privileges an (imagined) homeland, inquiries surrounding its music are mostly situated in the hostland. It follows that such inquiries usually resonate with concerns of cultural diversity, living

with difference, identity politics loosely grouped under discussions of multiculturalism – in the hostland. Ramnarine, for instance, casts her study of Carnival performances at the Victoria and Albert Museum largely in conceptions of the multicultural society of London: “how do we understand musical life in a multicultural society” (2007: 7).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the title of Gilroy’s book *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (1987) – black diaspora in a postcolonial era and the multicultural society of the United Kingdom – has probably set the framing for many diasporic music studies to come.

### **Production**

If the above two trajectories correspond with sound’s human and experiential dimensions in the multicultural society of the hostland, what follows stems more immediately from the other tradition of sound studies: the technicality, the making of music. In the words of Chow and Steintrager, “technical skills, instruments, and experiments, often rendered measurable and quantifiable, become the means of charting the sonic as mediated by machines and technologies” (2011: 4). Such a way of charting the sonic is particularly taken by ethnomusicologists. As suggested by Solomon, the “long-standing interest of ethnomusicologists in the practices of music-makers” has left their mark on diasporic studies of music, namely an accent on music production, not consumption (2015: 212). The special issue edited by Ramnarine is typical.

In its introductory article, Ramnarine, by confining the “musical performance” in the title of the issue into “music-making”, has clearly articulated that the research concern is not so much on diasporic music, but more specifically on diasporic music-making. Contributions to the issue delve into the kind of diasporic music-making, which, she argues, can be understood as “in the ordinariness of creative production, as musicians working as individual agents in their everyday environments, making musical choices that suit them and the audiences” (Ramnarine 2007: 7). Another common object of diasporic music study, *bhangra*, demonstrates similar concern with the practices of music-makers and making. Laura Leante, for instance, investigates the musical processes through which the original *bhangra* from the villages of Punjab has mutated to its current form in Britain (Leante 2004). She does so largely by way of street processions, disco performances, musical and lyrical texts, styles and subgenres, as well as instruments, to illustrate how British *bhangra* has become a means for migrants to construct their diasporic identity in their new home.

### **Periphery**

Amidst various practices of music-makers and making, particular genres and their associated diasporas enjoy particular theoretical and empirical attention. *Bhangra* is one of them. Leante’s study ensconces itself in a series of studies, tracing back to, for instance, Gerd Baumann’s (1990) and Gayatri Gopinath’s (1995) studies, both on *bhangra* in Britain. Similarly, *rai* music, presumably originated from Algeria which travels to the West, is well researched by, among others, Joan Gross, David McMurray, and Ted Swedenburg in the French context (2001), and Gabriele Marzani as a “global” sound (2003). The research popularity of *bhangra* and *rai* is in turn an index of their popularity among substantial populations of South Indian diasporic populations in Europe and North America as well as Algerian and Arabic migrant communities in Europe.

Such postcolonial embedding also applies to the investigation of Africa diaspora and music. Gilroy, terming the African diaspora as Black Atlantic, also the main title of his influential book, reflects on contemporary musical forms of the African diaspora and how they function to (re)

claim a pre-colonial past and to challenge notions of national culture (1993). Refracting the industrial importance of black music – and the global dominance of the Anglo-American scene where it thrives – is the prominent interface between black diaspora and academic inquiries on music. See for instance the edited volume exploring the African diaspora through the musical perspective by Monson (2003).

Thus has become one major trajectory in diasporic music studies, that is, tracking and investigating the roots and routes both music and diaspora take, to borrow Solomon's terminology, from the "periphery" to "the West", between "developing countries and the big cities of 'the West'" (Solomon 2015: 212–13). Such periphery–West configuration, in turn, often conflates with that of the colonized–colonizer, as shown in the studies surrounding Black Atlantic and British *bhangra*. There are of course exceptions, notably the Irish and the Jewish diaspora, for instance the works cited earlier by Moran and Seidler. Furthermore, there are isolated studies, for instance, on Korean diaspora in Russia, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan (Um 2000) and on the Chinese diaspora in the Netherlands (Chow 2011). While the former study is exceptional in its delinking from the postcolonial and the West, the latter, similarly not postcolonially grounded, follows a diasporic subject away from the West. And this is the case I will use for the rest of this chapter to posit some supplements I find necessary to enrich existing diasporic music study.

### **From Diana Zhu to Wang Shi'an**

I met Diana Zhu in 2006, when she was 15. It was the final of a singing contest for Chinese diasporas in Europe, held in Amsterdam, the winner of which would go to Hong Kong to join the global event, competing with winners from North America to South Africa. Born in 1990 of parents who migrated from Shanghai, Diana grew up in a small town in the Netherlands. She dreamt of a music career when she was a child. In particular, she wanted to become a singer in China. Diana did not win the global Chinese singing contest but she got a contract with Warner Music Kong Kong. In 2009, Diana moved to Shanghai to prepare herself for launching her music, and her contract was transferred to Warner Music Taiwan. In 2011, Diana moved again to Taipei. Subsequently, in 2013, under an artist name of Wang Shi'an, or Diana Wang, she released her debut album, which earned her some music awards in Taiwan.<sup>5</sup> In 2014, she released a series of singles. In between, Diana participated in a number of reality and talent shows as well as television drama series.<sup>6</sup> In 2015 she left Warner. In 2016, under Taipei-based label Cros Music, Diana started releasing songs in English; the first single was titled "Home".

The following discussion is based on fieldwork done for my published article (Chow 2011) and subsequent data collection stretching from 2011 to now, including additional rounds of interviews with Diana and her music producers in late 2011 as well as casual, private exchanges between Diana and me throughout the years.<sup>7</sup> In contradistinction with most diasporic studies, musically or not, I have chosen to focus on one individual; I call this "follow the person", inspired by Scott Lash and Celia Lury's "follow the object" (2007: 16), premising on the urge to "go beyond (media) representation and the foregrounding of movement, dynamic constitution between agents in cultural production" (Chow 2011: 796). From here, I want to use Diana and all her interplay with practices of music-making for the present purposes, namely to show in relief what else, and more, can be done in diasporic music study. Simply put, what I intend to do now, inspired by Kuan-hsing Chen's "Asia as method", is to use Asian diaspora as method, to mobilize "critical studies of experience in Asia ... to pose a different set of questions" (2010: 14–15).

## *Hope*

Diana's eyes shone whenever she recalled her childhood memories in Shanghai. She told me the sound, the people, the hustle and bustle of this big city, always in contrast with the quiet in the Dutch town she grew up with. After her very first visit to Shanghai, Diana did something she later attributed to as one decisive act, one life-shaping moment in her life. "Back in the Netherlands," she told me, "I did a drawing for my class. I drew a girl holding a microphone, singing. I was six, or perhaps five. And then I told them that was Asia, I liked Asia. And my dad and mom came from China, and I was Chinese. I wanted to go back. To sing, I like singing" (cited in Chow 2011: 784).

And she did go back, first Shanghai then Taipei. While Diana's articulation of her dream is drenched in memories of her experience in Shanghai as a child, mingled with longings for the "roots" of her parents, it is not only about the roots, the past, or memories – it is also about the future, about imagination, about hope. While issues of belonging, of identity, home, and community, as discussed earlier, dominate diasporic music studies, Diana's case speaks for a desideratum: hope, her own hope, projected to and potentially configuring individual diasporic life. Obviously this is not to disparage theoretical and empirical concerns with who one is and where one belongs; Diana's hope to make a music career in China, however, foregrounds the need to understand a (imagined) homeland not only as somewhere to go back to, as a potential sense of belonging, but also as something to look forward to, as a real drive of longing.

## *Homeland/centre*

Indeed, while I commenced my following of Diana in Amsterdam, her hope led her and me all the way to the other side of the world: first Shanghai and then Taipei. Reverting to the terminology mentioned earlier, this study is about the periphery in the West and then "back" to the periphery. The usage of the word "back" is of course problematic as Diana was not born there and the kind of music she grew up with, loved, and received training in, namely gospel music, was not particularly Chinese either. Even more problematic is the qualification of China as the "periphery", as we are experiencing the Rise of China as a major player in global politics and economics, albeit lesser in cultural terms. In that sense, the case of Diana represents another departure from dominant diasporic music studies, in that it is not confined to the paradigm of periphery-to/in-the West and its primary concern is not on the hostland but the (imagined) homeland.

It should be added that Diana's anchoring her musical hope on China, not on the Netherlands, is also related to her predicament as a diasporic member, namely that the Dutch-Chinese population does not invoke the kind of musical talents readily embodied by, say, the black diaspora, and is generally ostracized from the Dutch world of popular music. See the Gordon controversy I cited at the beginning of this chapter. Diana's hope does point to her and her fellow Chinese' "symbolic marginalization" in the Netherlands (Chow 2011). At the same time, her decision to pursue her career in China, an emerging global power offering greater opportunities for diasporic Chinese such as Diana, inserts her to the state-capital nexus writ large in the popular music industries. She was told by Warner to go on a diet, to perfect her command of "standard" Chinese, and to change her beloved black musical genres to more mainstream Chinese pop; in short, Diana was stripped of her possibility to perform a different Chinese-speaking woman singer, of her subversive potentials to dominant versions of Chineseness (Chow 2011). It was not coincidental that the first single she released after Warner, in 2016, was titled "Home", a pop rock number sung entirely in English and, in her own words, "based on R&B".<sup>8</sup> The study



of Diana indicates a realignment of concerns from multiculturalism in the hostland to nationalism in the homeland.

### ***Music?***

So far I have been discussing the music released by Diana, as it was music that guided her from the Netherlands to China – or at least the Chinese market, as her subsequent base of Taipei remains the major supplier of Chinese-language popular music and and pop stars. However, she has done far more than making music. In 2011, I interviewed Diana again after the publication of my study. It took place in Taipei and she told me almost right away her participation in a reality-cum-talent show in China the year before. In a secluded resort outside Beijing, she spent six months with 15 other young female contestants learning, in her view, two important things: how to face the camera, and how to be obedient. Subsequently, Diana was also assigned to a variety of “jobs”, such as presenting pop charts, interviewing veteran singer-celebrities, and also joining a dance competition. To date, she has acted in three online or television drama series.

“You can’t simply be a singer,” according to Terry Leung, of Warner Taiwan in charge of Diana’s first release. In an interview with me during the same period when I met Diana again, he mentioned the changes in the market, not only in Taiwan but also in Asia as a whole, where a singer “has to do TV dramas or films as well” to enhance exposure and profile, eventually to bring economic returns through, for instance, product endorsement when the sale of music itself cannot sustain. That Diana joined the reality-cum-talent show was the idea of the big boss, with the same marketing logic, Terry said. What Diana has been doing and what Terry has explained pose a stark contrast with one emphasis of diasporic music study: on music-making. Quite apart from the inquiries on musical style, genre, instrument, and other aspects of production, the case of Diana underwrites the need of diasporic music study to take into account specificities of local practices of cultural production, in this case the Chinese, where music-making can hardly be investigated on its own; rather, as argued by some scholars on media studies, it should be situated in a cross-media context and the convergence culture (Jenkins 2008).

### ***Gender***

That studies of music cannot be of music alone is particularly gendered. During my interviews with Diana and her music producers, her body was always an issue. More accurately, her body was perceived as not fulfilling the idealized version of Asian femininity: too fat. When I first saw Diana, in Amsterdam, she, at 1.64 metres, weighed 60–70 kg, she told me. When I met her the second time, in Shanghai, she weighed 48 kg. Her father told me later that the target Warner set for Diana was 43. Reducing weight was the “most important request” Warner imposed on her if she was to make a music career in China (Chow 2011: 800). When I met Diana in Taipei, she finished half of her fruit tea and told me how she took in her food and drinks in terms of “portions”. During the worst period of her dieting, Diana fainted a couple of times, generally frail.

That the career of a female singer is not to be anchored, at least not only, on her vocal ability, but also, or even more fundamentally, on her bodily appeal is especially blatant if compared to how a male colleague is treated. In my study, I compared Diana to Khalil Fong, who, with similar diasporic and musical backgrounds and under the same label at that point, was debuted totally faceless, without embodiment, so that all attention could be diverted to his voice, his musical upbringing, and talents (Chow 2011: 801). Such radically different treatments call for gender sensitivity in studies of diaspora, music included. While feminist scholars have long been cautioning against the conflation of youth cultures with boy cultures (McRobbie 1981), popular



music studies as well as diasporic music studies continue to tilt towards the male experience. As an exception underlining the rule, Moran flags up “gender” as an analytic category in her study of diasporic Irish music, as “women are typically overlooked” (Moran 2012: 13). In the words of Connell and Gibson, “[p]opular music remains an industry permeated by gendered norms and expectations at all levels” (2003: 8). Inquiries in diaspora and music have to sensitize themselves to gendered dimensions so as not to flatten diasporic experience into the male kind.

### Coda

To end this chapter, I want to paraphrase Ramnarine’s formulation as the lynchpin of doing diasporic music studies. While she refers to ethnomusicologists’ ways to negotiate “the contradictions between asserting the historical specificities of diaspora and avoiding the rigidities of diasporic essentialisms” (Ramnarine 2007: 1), I posit the need to be specific – historically, locally, gendered, and so on – precisely to show the diversity of diasporic experience within diaspora. I venture to open up some paths that I consider promising for further exploration. I will sketch three.

First, in connection with technological developments. How do diasporas use new technologies such as mobile sonic devices and social networks for their musical production, circulation and consumption? How do these technologies reconfigure diasporic experience, identity and community, in their hostland and/or homeland? Take Michael Bull’s ethnographic study of iPod uses as example, where he demonstrates how such devices are mobilized to privatize and aestheticize urban space (Bull 2013). If such investigation is reframed to a diasporic context, what would the “sonic bubbles” of diasporic members do? How different and how similar to “general” users?

Second, from the perspective of intersectionality. As explicated by Leslie McCall, “[i]nterest in intersectionality arose out of a critique of gender-based and race-based research for failing to account for lived experience at neglected points of intersection” (McCall 2005: 1780). In other words, researchers should alert themselves to the intersections of the diasporic (racial/ethnic) not only with gender, as discussed earlier, but also with other demographic categories or identity markers, such as age, class, and so forth. Age is particularly noteworthy given the bias of popular music industries and studies for young consumers. What objects of study would emerge if one looks beyond young diasporic members’ connection with music? I am at once reminded of the sonic preferences of some older Dutch–Chinese people I know: Chinese opera and Buddhist music (and chanting), both uncharted territories under studies of diasporic music, or sound, for that matter.

Finally, the limits of the field itself. Quoting Franz Kafka’s short story “The Silence of the Sirens”, Chow and Steintrager recuperate “a still more fatal weapon than their song, namely their silence” (cited in Chow and Steintrager 2011: 3). Given the limited space left here, it would be impossible to elaborate and engage with their thinking on the Sirens and their resisters, on female silence and male hearing. I would allow myself only to raise the possibility of diasporic silence as an object of inquiry – say, when a diasporic member or community is not allowed, encouraged, or willing to speak its “mother tongue”, or listen to music made thereof?<sup>9</sup> From here, the last question to ask is: how far can we talk of “diaspora”? In her essay provocatively titled “Against Diaspora”, Shu-mei Shih takes issue with the study of “Chinese diaspora” (2010). According to Shih, there are at least two problems: on the one hand, it is “complicit with China’s nationalist calling to ‘overseas Chinese’ who are supposed to long to return to the homeland”; on the other, it “unwittingly correlates with and reinforces the Western and other non-Western ... racialized constructions of Chineseness as perpetually foreign” (Shih 2010: 32).

While Shih proposes the “sinophone” as an alternative for the Chinese diaspora, the thorny task for “diasporic” studies of music and sound is, I believe, to remain vigilant, informed indeed by the keywords of specificity and diversity, as to decide or balance the emphasis on the former or latter of any hyphenated identity marker.

### Notes

- 1 Chinese names used in this chapter are written in the Chinese way, that is, family name first, except when they are commonly known as otherwise. All the translations from Chinese to English are done by the author.
- 2 To view the fragment concerned, go to: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wzEPgpSRm4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wzEPgpSRm4). For a commentary regarding the controversy and the response by Chinese and Asian diaspora, see Kartosen (2016).
- 3 Academically, when music is put in tandem with cartography and biography, the study of diasporic sound can be understood as a significant way “to redress the rather neglected place of geography in any analysis of popular music” (Connell and Gibson 2003: 4). Discussing from the discipline of geography whose concern is usually visible, Susan J. Smith argues alternately for the urgency to insert cultures of sound and music in study of place (1997).
- 4 There are at least two dominant versions or ideal models of multicultural society, fusion and diversity, or more vernacularly, the melting pot and the salad bowl, both of which, as Ramnarine points out, are grounded in difference (2007: 6). Diasporic music studies tend to configure their politics towards the latter.
- 5 It is a common practice in the Chinese-language pop music world for artists not to use their real names. Usually, record labels will consult fortune-tellers to coin an artist name, as in the case of Diana. As Diana is used to being called by her friends, including myself, as Diana, I will continue using this for the rest of the chapter.
- 6 The title song of Diana’s debut album has attracted more than three million YouTube viewings when I am writing this, 14 August 2016 ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuvLrTAsbGc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuvLrTAsbGc)). Arguably her greatest solo hit, “Love Exists”, released as the ending theme song of a television drama series she acted in and only as a single, has attracted more than 23 million YouTube viewings ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qu1ZTCEw6wg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qu1ZTCEw6wg)). In July 2018 Diana moved to Hong Kong and started releasing music under the indie label set up by Khalid Fong.
- 7 For a reflection on the research project on Diana and me as a researcher, as someone working in the music industries, and as a fellow diasporic member, see Chow 2011. I was born and grew up in Hong Kong, relocated to the Netherlands in 1992. In 2011 I moved “back” to Hong Kong where I currently am based.
- 8 See: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrEee4bhc7Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrEee4bhc7Y).
- 9 Singapore, with its privileging of mandarin Chinese as state-sanctioned mother tongue for the Chinese diaspora to the extent of not allowing Cantonese-speaking pop music to be played in public, is a case at point.

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