Representations of Chinese Rock

An Analysis of Contemporary Reviews of Chinese Rock-Groups

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Summary

In this paper I will try to address tendencies of Orientalist representation found in certain examples of Western English-written album-reviews. When reviewing Chinese bands some music-critics have reduced contemporary Chinese rock-bands to merely being copies of Western groups. (Both good and bad) Of which some groups only seem to deserve attention because they were part of a Western protagonist’s pop-cultural “discovery” - a discovery by the West for the West. Often the protagonist (journalist, writer or compiler) is highlighted as an outstanding individual because he or she found something “rare” to present to a Western audience. I will argue that representations such as these reinvigorate Orientalism, as Edward Said defines the term. In addition, Chinese bands have sometimes been presented as under-developed; not only musically - as mere copyists - but also culturally; as members of a culturally “under-developed” state. In that way certain Western music-journalists contribute to create a discourse which furthers the conceived cultural-hegemony of the “West” over the “East.” My analysis of album-reviews published on the Internet will also try to show a tendency among certain music-journalists to compare Chinese bands solely on the basis of Western rock-tradition and Western bands. In regard to this I will address problems that might occur when one doesn’t take time to familiarize oneself with Chinese rock within its own context. I will also try to address examples of journalists placing Chinese bands on a cultural evolutionary scale of development. Some bands are depicted as “needing” more time to mature before they can live up to “our” standards. In some cases, certain journalists have predicted that China might possibly foster some good rock bands, but only after much “needed” future development. At worst, this implies that Chinese musicians at present are unaware, or ignorant of their current social and political environment; a historical development the journalist of course fully understands. An analysis of a selection of album-reviews from the period 2004-2011 will hopefully shed some light on some important aspects of Western music-critics’ representations of Chinese rock-bands. To help contextualize these tendencies within an East Asian context I have also done additional comparative analysis of contemporary Western reviews of Japanese rock-groups.
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1. Representations of Chinese Rock

1.1 Introduction

"Music, however conceived, has the power of reference, and the objects it signifies range from pure musical materiality, to entities (such as things, real or imaginary beings, persons, and so on) and all forms of individual and cultural representations, from emotions to political ideas." 1

Music is representation. The dissemination of these representations does also lead to further representations. However, when faced with the task of interpreting musical representations one does indeed have to embrace a multitude of interesting questions. Who is playing the music? What are they playing? Why are they playing it? And who is it intended for? Not to mention the questions needed to contextualize music historically. In other words, a deeper understanding of music demands more than just listening.

To help understand present day representations of Chinese rock it’s interesting to have a quick look at some of the evolving notions of Chinese music.

1.1.1 Historical Background

In the early twentieth century Chinese intellectuals rebelled against the feudal traditions that dominated cultural life both before and through the Imperial Dynasties. After the Qing Dynasty’s fall in 1912, both the New Culture Movement, and The May Fourth Movement of 1919 typified central layers of Chinese intellectuals with their yearning for modernization. Supported by artists, writers, and musicians the New Culture Movement saw the balanced appropriation of foreign intellectual influence as a golden mean for modernizing China. While witnessing the Japanese technical and militaristic superiority resulted from the Westernization process initiated under the Meiji Restoration, Chinese intellectuals could not escape the feeling of backwardness in their traditional heritage. Among others, the composer Xian Xinghai (1905-1945) was integral to the musical modernization which started with the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912. Xian travelled to Paris to study music at the

1 J.L. Martinez Semiotics and the Art Music of India 2000, P.1
Paris Conservatory. Ultimately, his greatest importance as a representative of Chinese modernism was made evident in his devotion to radicalize society through music. He envisioned himself as part of an elite group which by the help of music would herd the masses towards political glory. Xian put his political ambitions into his music. The music was the centerpiece, but it nurtured its power from its political intent. In this way the modern function of music widely expanded from traditional functions. In the traditional Confucian order the political implication of music was on a personal level; an individual gained moral enlightenment through the process of playing music, which in turn benefited society. For Xian and his generation of modernizers the political function of music expanded from a personal level to an ideological level.

Before the Peoples Republic of China was founded in 1949, it was Shanghai that was the entertainment capital of China. Western record companies like Pathe, RCA Victor, and EMI had already established offices there in the 1920’s. New venues were created, and both Chinese and foreign musicians started to play and make music together - first in military bands, then in orchestras, as well as in jazz- and pop-bands. This development is very interesting compared to the development of rock in post-reform China. Szu Wei Chen has written a fine paper on the music scene in Shanghai during the Republic-era. Chen shows that Shanghai mustered an entertainment industry which furthered the development of the popular song, and structured an industry of music-production that was strikingly similar to the contemporary Chinese music-industry. “In the 1930s Shanghai was a metropolis famous for its nightlife and cabarets which outnumbered those of any other city in China.” “There were American, Filipino, Russian, Indian and other Oriental bands playing American jazz, ballroom dance music or Chinese popular songs in different venues. There were the theme songs of Chinese films and the songs played during the intermission, which not only captivated the audiences in the cinema but also often took the whole of Shanghai by storm and were sung in nightclubs and broadcast over the airwaves.” The economic and political aspects which ushered this pop-cultural blossoming are very similar to the influences emergent in China’s major cities since 1978. In this way you can say that the foreign influences which impacted Republic-era Shanghai has had direct relevance for modern Chinese music. Chen’s work shows the necessity of acknowledging this period and its relation

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2 Frederick Lau Music in China 2008, P.106
3 Szu Wei Chen The Music Industry and Popular Song in 1930’s and 1940’s Shanghai 2007
4 Szu Wei Chen The Music Industry and Popular Song in 1930’s and 1940’s Shanghai 2007, P.14
5 Szu Wei Chen The Music Industry and Popular Song in 1930’s and 1940’s Shanghai 2007, P.14
to the future development of the Chinese pop- and rock-industry. Not much has been written on this extremely vibrant period, but Zsu Wei Chen’s paper sets a good example. During this period foreign the Shanghai Conservatory of Music housed the composer Alexander Tcherepnin, (1899-1977) which started to constructively address the matter of amalgamating Chinese and foreign musical influences. Tcherepnin, who eventually took a Chinese wife, did in fact contribute substantially to the formation of both Japanese and Chinese modern music. Tcherepnin made a remarkable effort in spreading knowledge on classical music in a region of severe conflict.6 His Chinese student He Luting (1903-1999) became living proof of this. This Shanghai-based musician eventually composed some of the first critically acclaimed pieces of modern Western-based music in a distinct Chinese style.7 However, when the PRC was founded in 1949 the musical plurality which emerged during the Republic-era was washed away. The Communist Party condemned the modern entertainment-industry as spiritual pollution. They strictly promoted an ideologically “correct” music for the masses.8 Mao Zedong had made the Party’s stance on artistic activity perfectly clear at the Yan’an Talks on Literature and Art in 1942: Art’s main purpose was to “serve the working people.”9 Arnold Perris notes: “He (Mao) scolded some artists for not having grasped or accepted clearly basic Marxist concepts.”10 So, from 1949 artists were to be re-educated to learn the “correct” ways of producing revolutionary art. Art in this notion was meant to further the proletariat’s interests and strengthened mass-education.11 This was structured on a Leninist view on cultural production which in literary terms has been coined Socialist-Realism. By 1966, at the onset of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) the Gang of Four took a fundamentalist approach to the concept of ideologically “correct” music. Spearheaded by Mao’s wife Jiang Qing the Gang of Four only allowed highly politicized music. One of the few genres supported by the government during the Cultural Revolution was Yangbanxi; traditional musical plays that were re-written to fit the revolutionary agenda - boosting fighting spirit and indoctrinating the countries youth.12 This was music produced to bolster a world-wide communist revolution. By 1976 the Gang of Four was dethroned. Deng Xiaoping initiated economic reforms, which

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6 See: www.tcherepnin.com  
7 Frederick Lau *Music in China* 2008, P.97  
11 Michael Sullivan *Art in China since 1949* 1999, P.712  
12 Frederick Lau *Music in China* 2008, PP.135-139
proceeded hand in hand with a long anticipated government relaxation of the cultural sphere. The Reform and Opening Policy encouraged foreign trade. This curtailed a vast array of new cultural influences. The number of foreign businessmen visiting China steadily increased in the late 70’s. They brought with them new influences which spawned great creativity in a country that had been more or less hermetically closed the last decade.

It was at this point the first rock-bands started playing at “international clubs” in the hotel bars of Beijing’s embassy area. In 1979 the band BJ Allstars was formed by Graham Earnshaw. They started playing at hotel bars, mostly performing Santana and Rolling Stones covers. In 1980 the first Chinese rock band Wan Li Ma Wang was formed at Beijing Foreign Language University. In the early 80’s many of these bands consisted of students, often both Chinese and foreign-exchange students. Mainly catering to an audience of foreign businessmen and Chinese students, the bands often adopted a repertoire of Western cover-songs and Western influenced originals. At this point the artist Cui Jian (born 1961) stood out as one of the most respected and popular writers of Chinese rock songs. Based on the musical foundation of classic-rock his songs had Chinese lyrics, and he tackled topics such as the dichotomy of Chinese tradition and modernization. Cui Jian made a huge impact on Chinese popular culture when he performed the song Yi Wu Suoyou live at a televised concert at the Beijing Worker’s Stadium in 1986. The song became immensely popular, both because of its successful synergy of Western and Chinese tones, and because of the contents of its lyrics. In the song love conquers the shallowness of materialism. Written at a point when the market economy suddenly intensified occupational competition, and the nouveau riche were beginning to flaunt their easy money, Cui Jian’s song made people stop to wonder the consequences of the new market reforms. Paradoxically though, for Cui’s personal sake his hit-record ensured him enough money to buy a new apartment and a new car. From this point on Chinese rock has grown through the influences of Canto-Pop (a colloquial term for the late 70’s, early 80’s, pop-music of Hong-Kong and Taiwan) as well as Japanese, Korean and Western music. In 1986 the British pop-group Wham, as well as the American surf-rock duo Jan & Dean (who had success in the US in the 60’s) performed at separate occasions Beijing. In 2005 the Rolling Stones performed in Shanghai, with Cui Jian as their opening act.

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13 See: www.rockinchina.com
14 See: www.rockinchina.com
15 Michael Bristow Chinese Rock Legend Sings On 2001
16 See: www.rockinchina.com
1.1.2 A Short Historical Perspective on Western Representations of Chinese Music

The Western public got some of its first knowledge of Chinese music through missionaries. Jesuit priests such as Matteo Ricci, (1552-1610) introduced Western mathematics, religion, and music to the Chinese Imperial court. In 1793 when the Macartney-embassy returned to England after their famous encounter with the Chinese court they brought with them a Chinese boatman’s song as a novelty act, or as “an exotic titillation,” as Kraus puts it. The general impression purveyed underlined exoticism and “otherness.” These characteristics were celebrated, and simultaneously mocked by Western audiences. Through the eighteenth century – “the Age of Enlightenment” - a handful of famous composers were incorporating “exotic” Oriental elements in their work; as exemplified in Haydn’s Symphony No. 100 and the Rondo alla Turca of Mozart’s Piano Sonata K. 331. At the highpoint of Western imperialism (1830-1900) a notion of “Chinese” music and culture was commonly mocked in movie scores and musical plays - among other in the piano-piece “Chopsticks” from 1877. Richard Curt Kraus gives us his opinion on the play: “The publication of “Chopsticks” in Glasgow in 1877 may mark the high point of European self-satisfaction and condescension.” This durable piano piece offers as an image of Chinese culture an obnoxious ditty, falsely harmonized, written in an uncharacteristic triple time, and easily mastered - like the Orient itself – by children and beginners.” “Chopsticks” was one of several examples of Chinese culture being represented as under-developed, childlike and un-scientific. Kraus also lists other extremities, such as the racist lyrics of the Florentz Siegfield show Kid Boots: (1923) “Things were O.K. until the day Ma learned a new Chinese game. China you’re a poison to me, You broke up my whole family: since Ma is playing Mah Jong, Pa wants all the “Chinks” hung.” This song was performed by the lovable American singer and actor Eddie Cantor (1892-1964) in mock Chinese melody.

From the turn of the century until the formation of the PRC in 1949 Chinese contemporary music was dominated by Shanghai’s flourishing entertainment industry. Although entertainers and pop- and jazz-singers like Bai Hong, (1919-1992) Zhou Xuan, (1918-1957) and Gong

17 Richard Curt Kraus Pianos and Politics in China 1989, P.33
18 Richard Curt Kraus Pianos and Politics in China 1989, P.34
19 Richard Curt Kraus Pianos and Politics in China 1989, P.34
20 Richard Curt Kraus Pianos and Politics in China 1989, P.34
21 Richard Curt Kraus Pianos and Politics in China 1989, P.35
Qiuxia (1916-2004) captivated mixed audiences by aptly mastering Western genres, they were of no real interest for Western media as they were singing in Chinese.

After 1949 most of the Western capitalist countries was conceived the music in the PRC merely as a propaganda tool. Though, in the latter part of the 1960’s Western counter-culture started to harbor a fascination for Maoism and the Cultural Revolution. Although McCarthyism had demonized communism, that didn’t stop Western youths from growing skeptical of capitalism’s political foundation - especially during the Vietnam War. (1955-1975) Skepticism was shared in the USA and in Western Europe. For example in Norway, Maoism found great popularity in student politics. Marxist-Leninist students even went on to form the Norwegian political party AKP (Worker’s Communist Party) in 1973. They had a devout Maoist flank who endorsed armed revolution. Their politics also influenced Norwegian youths’ conception of foreign culture. In the Norwegian, and in other Western rock-scenes of the late 60’s and early 70’s, many popular bands denounced capitalism and consumer culture. Eventually though, the majority of these “revolutionary artists” were willingly commoditized by the record industry. But, you do have people such as Robert Wyatt, (Born 1945) a pronounced communist, known from his work with Soft Machine and Matching Mole, who gives a representative view of how some artists, based in Western counter-culture, communicated a favorable image of Mao and the communist revolution. Matching Mole’s Little Red Record, (1972) produced by Robert Fripp, is a good example of this - not only in its snappy record-title, but also with its distinctive Socialist-Realist cover-art.

After Deng Xiaoping’s Reform and Opening policy was initiated Chinese contemporary music has slowly gotten more attention in Western media. Since Chinese rock bands started to emerge in the early 1980’s Western media have sometimes focused on Chinese rock as a means of rebellion. Hao Huang has however pointed out that from the beginning of the 90’s many Chinese rock bands opted to avoid direct confrontation with the authorities in hopes of having a successful commercial career.

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23 See: http://www.politicalresources.net/norway.htm and Aftenposten http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/riks/politikk/article1104148.ece
2. Theory

When discussing the representation of cultural phenomenon, it is hard to escape the work of Edward Said. (1935-2003) With *Orientalism* (1978) Said aimed at illuminating how Western Orientalist scholars and writers who studied and depicted the cultures of the Middle-East, Africa, India, and the Far-East contributed to establish and uphold a power hegemony.

2.1 Orientalism

The term Orientalism has several definitions: Orientalism is used to denote a genre of painting popularized by nineteenth century European artists such as Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) and Emile Vernet-Lecomte. (1821-1900) In each their own way they incorporated elements of non-European, often African, Middle-Eastern, or Eastern imagery in their art. This was a popular artistic trend which promoted the adaptation of “exotic” elements from distant countries.

Another definition, the one Said uses, refers to the academic field of Orientalist scholars, and serves to denote the process of which they constructed a system of scholarship “on the East by the West.” This critical examination of Orientalism is often divided into two types; positive and negative Orientalism.

Positive Orientalism underlines the mystical, exotic and erotic attributes of “the other.” These are seen as positive qualities, enigmatic forces, which even the “Westerner” seldom (if ever) will fully comprehend. In *Orientalism and Religion* (1999) Richard King shows how the religious practices of Buddhism in India often have been described positively as mysterious and exotic. King asserts how culture and religion function as a field of power relations. He shows us how the positive representation of the mystical archaism found in Buddhism both fuelled Western Orientalist scholars longing for nostalgia, and served as a means in “which the dynamic modernity of the West could be successfully contrasted.”

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26 Stefano A.E. Leoni *Western Middle-East Music Imagery in the Face of Napoleon’s Enterprise in Egypt* 2007, P.171
27 Richard King *Orientalism and Religion* 1999
28 Richard King *Orientalism and Religion* 1999, P.118
Negative Orientalism highlights the irrational, incompetent and un-civilized behavior of “the other.” Said shows how the Western Orientalist scholars established and upheld hegemony by projecting an image of “the other” as a diametrical opposite of themselves. The Orientalists cemented the characterization of themselves as civilized, distinguished, and scientific by highlighting the apparent lack of these qualities in the subjects they studied. This successfully contrasted alleged qualities. Orientalist scholars created a tradition of accumulating knowledge by reducing the objects of their research into easily identifiable stereotypes which were systematically fitted into fixed categories. The proficiency of the Orientalists’ research methods was thus strengthened when observing how hopelessly “un-scientific” the Oriental was. By projecting a negative stereotype onto that which was unknown, or seemingly chaotic in its “otherness,” the Orientalists highlighted their own methods through the obvious deficiencies of “the other.” The accumulated knowledge produced by the Orientalists created the foundations of a manipulative power structure - a production which Said links to Western imperialism. Through the imperialist conquests the well-developed West set out to benefit themselves, but in turn also to help “civilize” the under-developed East. This undertaking was legitimized through the discourse formed by the Orientalist’s research.29

Said marks the beginning of “modern” Orientalism with Napoleon’s occupation of Egypt in 1798.30 The Orientalist ideas legitimizing the occupation did seemingly have a positive tone - ancient Egyptian culture was seen as spectacular and awe-inspiring, although, the emphasis laid on the past tense; Egypt had once been amazing, but, by 1798 its admired greatness was merely written history, however fascinating or exotic. Since Napoleon himself was a huge fan of Egyptology he assembled a whole corps of Orientalist scholars while mounting his troops in Italy. Their mission was to school the Egyptians. In an Orientalist perspective, the Egyptians did encompass a multitude of different qualities; their “otherness” was diverse and at times enigmatic. They were un-civilized though exotic, chaotic and fragmented, but still pure in essence - an essence they somehow had grown out of touch with. The Orientalists sought to reshape this essence in a modernized context. The problem arose when the Orientalists attributed certain characteristics to “the other;” dishonest, lustful, violent, scheming, greedy, and so forth. (The exact opposite of the civilized Westerner, who found a moral compass through reason) The scholars based their argumentation on their own expertise as Orientalists, believing that their systematic and scientific knowledge clearly outshone “the

29 Edward Said Orientalism 1978
30 Edward Said Orientalism 1978, P.55
other’s” own self-awareness. Thereby, as they presented representations of the “Oriental” they ultimately ended up “Orientalizing the Oriental,”^31 as Said puts it. In so saying, he points to a scholarly tradition (going back even further than Napoleon’s occupation of Egypt in 1798) which was cemented by famous Orientalists like Silvestre De Sacy, (1758-1838) Ernest Renan (1823-1892) and Edward William Lane (1801-1876) by the turn of the nineteenth century. It points to a process of reconstructing the Orient through the eyes of the Orientalist.^32 The likes of Sacy, Renan and Lane established a scientific foundation enabling their contemporary and future Orientalists to embrace the Orient both near and far, with a fixed set of “truths.” Seeing that the Orientalist profession was established with scientific intent, the projection of diametrically opposed characteristics on “the other” was easily backed up by self-content professionalism. As Said shows, this sometimes resulted in Western scholars stating scientific claims on the basis of texts produced by people who had only read about Egypt or China in a library. As follows, the “Orient” they represented often rested on characteristics already apparent within their academic tradition. Thus, the “Orient” became a reconstruction of previous representations. It didn’t exist in its own right, it existed as something the Orientalists had reduced, systemized, and characterized, over and over again. They ultimately created an “Orient.” It was partly conjured up by producing self-content prophesies - often basing scientifically proven “facts” on pre-conceived myth and prejudice. The Orientalists ultimately created their “Orient” from the bosom of their own world of ideas. They “Orientalized” the Orient by squeezing the “real” Orient, so to speak, into their pre-conceived definitions of how the Orient should be.

2.2 Discourse and Hegemony

Of the abovementioned terms, there are two terms that are central to Said’s theoretical foundation; discourse and hegemony.

Said often relates his Orientalism critique to the discourse the Orientalists participated in. He looks to Michel Foucault (1926-1984) when elaborating how this participation both shaped and helped to produce the discourse’s content. Foucault links the formation of discourse to power. Discourse is formed and operates in close relation to the forming of a power-structure. For Foucault it would be impossible to disseminate the Orientalist’s discourse without

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^31 Edward Said Orientalism 1978, PP.62-86
^32 Edward Said Orientalism 1978, P.139
addressing the power-relationship within the discourse, or more importantly, the power-relationship which the discourse in itself contributes to produce. Foucault relates the formation of power-relations within discourse to procedures of controlling and limiting the discourse.\(^{33}\) In *L’Ordre du Discours* (1971) Foucault refers to a transition at the end of the sixteenth century when intellectuals’ “will to knowledge”\(^ {34}\) most clearly encapsulated reality through observable, measureable, and classifiable objects. He points out that from this point on the emphasis on technical definition laid the foundation for what was to be considered as science. In order to be recognized as a “truth” the science-objects had to be verifiable.\(^ {35}\) This meant that scientific discourse was to be formed by verifiable functions, measureable spaces, observable reactions, and classifiable behavior. To get to the point of actually verifying an object there precipitated a procedure of reduction and control. The multitude of variations had to be reduced to an identifiable entity, which in turn had to be measureable to have a concrete function. In Foucault’s eyes these reductive control methods were means of establishing control of knowledge, as well as creating boundaries for what was to be “acceptable” as science. In other words, to limit the discourse created power over its content. Foucault shows this in his studies of the mad. *The History of Madness* (1961) questions why the opinions of those labeled “mad” historically have lacked study, or haven’t been taken seriously intellectually. All because the madman’s utterances are unidentifiable within the limits of regulated discourse, thus rendering him powerless.\(^ {36}\)

Said’s use of Foucault’s term of discourse is also linked to Antonio Gramsci’s (1891-1937) use of the term *hegemony*. Gramsci defines the term hegemony on the basis of an intersecting relationship between *political society*; the state, and state institutions - and *civil society*; often characterized as the private sphere.\(^ {37}\) These two are defined by Gramsci as having different ways of gaining social control. The state gains control through coercion, (force) while hegemony in the private sphere is established through consent.\(^ {38}\) Coercion might for example be executed by the police, or the law as it’s practiced in the courthouse. Consensual hegemony is attributed by Gramsci - as a devout communist - to being produced by the bourgeoisie as they subjugate the working-class to ideological persuasion.\(^ {39}\) Channels of

\(^{33}\) Michel Foucault *L’Ordre du Discours* 1971, PP.12-14 (Norwegian edition)

\(^{34}\) Michel Foucault *L’Ordre du Discours* 1971, P.13 (Norwegian edition)

\(^{35}\) Michel Foucault *L’Ordre du Discours* 1971, P.13 (Norwegian edition)

\(^{36}\) Michel Foucault *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* 1961 (English edition, 2006)

\(^{37}\) Paul Ransome *Antonio Gramsci – A New Introduction* 1992, P.138

\(^{38}\) Paul Ransome *Antonio Gramsci – A New introduction* 1992, P.139

\(^{39}\) Paul Ransome *Antonio Gramsci – A New introduction* 1992, PP.141-144
ideological persuasion might for instance be TV, music, radio, churches, political parties and so on. The consent created underlines the capitalist subordination of the working class. Sometimes this subordination is upheld by giving the working class a false sense of entitlement, achieved by partially giving in to their demands. This does, according to Gramsci, re-enforce the capitalist social-structure because the working class is persuaded to believe that the demands being met in fact are contributing to change. However, the false entitlement merely illustrates how working class protagonists are operating as agents in a capitalist social-structure - instead of actually contributing to create a radically different structure.\(^{40}\) In Gramsci’s hegemony the political and the civil society sometimes overlap, just as coercion and consent also overlap; they are often intertwined methods of social control. By creating consent, not only scientifically, but also socially, it is established a cultural leadership; a cultural hegemony, as Gramsci calls it.\(^{41}\)

2.3 Criticism of Said’s Use of the Term Orientalism

Said’s most notorious adversary has been the British-American historian Bernard Lewis. (Born 1916) He refutes Said’s critical examination of the term. Lewis reckons Said has simply diluted the meaning of the word Orientalism; a word which according to Lewis ideally should stick to its original definition; an academic discipline.\(^{42}\) Lewis defends the Orientalists as custodians of a great scholarly tradition, and questions Said’s use of the term in relation to imperialism. Another critic of Said’s argumentation is Ernest Gellner. (1925-1995) Gellner, a philosopher and social-anthropologist criticized Said for having a narrow understanding of the impact of imperialism. The over-simplified divide between “imperialist-baddies and resister-goodies,”\(^{43}\) which Gellner attributes to Said, neglects the positive effects that have followed imperialism.\(^{44}\) Gellner also underlines that Said’s use of the term Orientalism ultimately only shows that something is wrong, without giving a concrete solution as of how to judge or deal with the wrongdoings. This is justified critique.

Chen Xiaomei has also written some well-founded criticism of Said. She questions Said’s representation of passivity in “the other.” Chen argues that “the other” is a result of a

\(^{40}\) Paul Ransome *Antonio Gramsci – A New Introduction* 1992, PP.138-144  
\(^{41}\) Edward Said *Orientalism* 1978, P.17  
\(^{42}\) Bernard Lewis *The Question of Orientalism* 1982, P.2  
\(^{43}\) Ernest Gellner *The Mightier Pen: The Double Standards of Inside-Out Colonialism* 1993, PP.3-4  
\(^{44}\) Ernest Gellner *The Mightier Pen: The Double Standards of Inside-Out Colonialism* 1993, PP.3-4
symbiotic relationship between “the East” and “the West,” rather than just a passive receiver.45

Many of the debates spurred by Said’s *Orientalism* have put focus on the aftermath of colonization, questioning if, or by which means “the other” after de-colonization can describe his or her reality independent of the cultural hegemony established in the colonial-era.

2.4 Literature on Orientalism in Popular Culture

There has been written a good deal about Orientalism in popular culture, both in music and in film. *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* edited by Michael Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar,46 and "Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear by Tim Jon Semmerling are popular alternatives.47 Most commonly Orientalism in music refers to the European composers who adopted non-European musical elements into their work, as for example the abovementioned work of Mozart and Haydn. In this regard there have been made several studies, as for instance Stefano A.E. Leoni’s interesting study of how Napoleon’s artistic entourage depicted the “East” musically in *Western Middle-East Music Imagery in the Face of Napoleon’s Enterprise in Egypt*,48 or *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s-1940s*, Portrayal of the East edited by Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon. Clayton and Zon also discuss musical theory and representation.49 In *Musical Exoticism, Images and Reflections* Ralph P. Locke writes on Orientalism and Exoticism in classical music, discussing nationality and exoticism, and the stereotyping of “the other.”50 Some of these studies often have a strong focus on Orientalism as a musical genre - sometimes mixing theoretical analysis of musical stylistics with the notions Said has brought to the term Orientalism. This is constructive and interesting, but my short paper will not focus on musical theory - it will mainly stick to theory related to Said’s definition of Orientalism - and try to illuminate relatable aspects in Western music journalists’ present day representations of Chinese music. That is the main goal of my study.

45 Chen Xiaomei *Occidentalism* 1995, P.24
46 Micheal Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar (editors) *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* 1997
47 Tim Jon Semmerling "Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear 2006
48 Stefano A.E. Leoni *Western Middle-East Music Imagery in the Face of Napoleon’s Enterprise in Egypt* 2007
49 Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon (editors) *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s-1940s*, Portrayal of the East 2007
50 Ralph P. Locke *Musical Exoticism, Images and Reflections* 2009
2.5 Hypothesis

Based on this theoretical and historical background, coupled with my research on the Internet I would like to pose the following hypothesis:

Certain representations of Chinese rock bands in English written web-based album reviews from the period 2004-2011 have, by means of presenting Orientalist representations of Chinese bands, contributed to create a discourse which furthers a conceived “Western” cultural-hegemony.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{51} I use the word \textit{conceived} to highlight the fact that no given culture is de facto “better” than the other, (only different, I would argue) not to say that there doesn’t exist cultural-hegemony
3. Method and Methodology

3.1 Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is my core method. A detailed analysis of the music journalists’ rhetoric and arguments is meant to set focus on the deliberate, and the seemingly less conscious use of Orientalist phrasing and representation. A textual analysis provides detailed insight into how music journalists in some cases, re-invigorate certain Orientalist clichés and argumentation. Eiliv Vinje has pointed out that the purpose of textual analysis may be text-internal or text-external – the analysis can limit itself to the words in the text, or it can draw on text-external factors like the author’s intention, genre-conventions or the context in which the text was written. In my analysis I have pre-dominantly studied the texts in relation to text-external factors - mainly the theory of Said, Foucault and Gramsci presented above. I have not focused on text-internal factors like linguistics. Because my goal was to illuminate how these texts relate to a tradition of writing, I have tried question the writers’ intentions, as well as their texts’ various representational functions. Since I have no purpose of demonizing Western music-journalism as a whole, I have tried to highlight both positive and negative methods of representation.

Taken that the amount of material available on the Internet is enormous, I have tried to narrow down the material used, and highlight theoretically relevant examples. To some extent, I have tried to narrow down the comparative textual analysis to specific releases; analyzing different occurrences of Orientalist representation in various reviews of one single album. This method does to some degree make the representational factors more easily visible.

3.2 Qualitative Analysis

My analysis has been structured on qualitative research of primary sources collected on the internet. Qualitative research methods highlight intrinsic qualities and their relation to external factors. I have nevertheless decided to challenge the topic of this paper because of its frequent emergence in contemporary reviews. However, my goal is not to establish the exact

52 Eiliv Vinje Tekst og tolkning 1993, P.29
frequency, or base my analysis on quantitative results - I have set my eye on a select group of examples, and studied individual representations in relation to the abovementioned theory.

When it comes to qualitative method and methodology I am familiar with Pål Repstad’s work. Even though his writings to a large degree focus on field-work, they have been resourceful in reminding me to keep a certain analytical distance to texts - texts which in this case have been studied very closely. In doing qualitative research of primary sources it is of course also important to be aware of the way I use both definitions and categories in my analysis. I will keep the methodology of Miles Fairburn as a reminder not to generalize from the particular, or base my research on unrepresentative data. Strauss and Corbin also underline that “if you begin with a list of already identified categories, you may, and are indeed very likely to, get in the way of discovery.” This is somewhat similar to Said and Foucault’s warning of pre-conceived and over-enthusiastic categorization. They warn of essentializing by reducing a great variety into stereotypes. Or, by squeezing specific objects into categories instead of seeing the object within the framework of a bigger whole. On that note, if I am going to apply Said and Foucault’s theory on my research of Western music journalism, I must also apply the same methods on my own writing. Hopefully I will resist the temptation of drawing quick and easy conclusions. At the same time I duly note that a dogmatic use of theory to supports my hypothesis might also impede my research.

I have included reviews of metal albums. Since metal has an undeniable connection to the heavy blues-rock of the late sixties (Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and so on) I see no problem justifying this.

Taken that the field of my research is fairly fresh, so to speak, I do recognize the fact that the amount of primary sources is somewhat limited. Although my study is concentrated on a substantial amount of data gathered on the Internet, I am aware that what I have found does not constitute an inconceivable quantity. There is however always a possibility of finding more on the web, or going beyond the confines of this paper and exploring similar tendencies existent in the printed media.

53 Pål Repstad Mellom nærhet og distanse 2002
54 Miles Fairburn Social History: Problems, Strategies and Methods 1999, PP.39-58
55 Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin Basics of Qualitative Research 1990, P.49
3.3 Comparative Analysis and Discourse Analysis

A comparative analysis of reviews of Chinese and Japanese bands is also included. This is intended to illuminate similarities and differences within the East-Asian region. To help contextualize the textual and comparative analysis it is also required to see this as an exercise of discourse analysis. As shown above Said’s reading of Foucault emphasized the term discourse. As my material of analysis actively contributes to shape a contemporary discourse on East-Asian culture, it is also natural to see my work here as related to discourse analysis. But, I will not venture into any overtly detailed argumentation analysis. My intention is to highlight the research-material’s connection to the abovementioned theory on discourse - while trying to shed light on its impact in shaping contemporary discourse.

People have of course discussed the importance of critical discourse analysis, and there is no single method which clearly reigns unquestioned. A good analogy is however presented by Gunther Kress. He talks about his work at an Institute of Education, and gives a meaningful example of curriculum being “a design for a future social subject.”

“...The curriculum, and its associated pedagogy, puts forward a set of cultural, linguistic, and social resources which students have available as resources for their own transformation, in relation to which students constantly construct, reconstruct and transform their subjectivity.” It is no problem transferring this notion of curriculum onto the “curriculum” produced by the music-press. As musical authorities critics present representations which have the possibility of transforming the reader’s subjectivity. It is therefore meaningful to subject music-journalism to critical analysis, and examine its impact on cultural discourse.

56 Gunther Kress Representational Resources and the Production of Subjectivity 1996, P.16
57 Gunther Kress Representational Resources and the Production of Subjectivity 1996, P.16

4.1 Unexpected Discoveries

In 2007 the compilation album *Look directly into the Sun – China Pop 2007* was released by Bloodshot Records.\(^{58}\) The album consists of newly recorded songs from a variety of Beijing-based rock bands. Since its release it has been reviewed by several web-based music journalists - mostly gaining praise. The album was compiled by the British musician Martin Atkins. (Born 1959) He is known for his collaboration with groups such as Public Image Limited, Ministry, Nine Inch Nails, Pigface and Killing Joke. The fact that he went to Beijing and compiled an album of Chinese rock songs is in itself constructive and positive. However, when the album has been reviewed an unfortunate emphasis has emerged. The emphasis has been put on the individual Martin Atkins, and his role as a “discoverer.” Rhetoric is presented which questions if these bands would actually exist if Atkins had not discovered them. Music journalist Angela Zimmerman writes: “Martin Atkins headed to Beijing in the fall of 2006 and was astounded by the thriving underground music scene he found there. Atkins is an all-around prolific music guy—owner of Invisible Records; drummer for Public Image Ltd., Ministry, and Nine Inch Nails; author; producer—and upon his exploration of Chinese rock, he found it to be as dynamic as the late ’70s London scene, as engaging as the early ’80s New York punk movement. After filming 80 hours of footage, signing several bands, and recording tracks from dozens of acts, his discovery eventually gave way to this compilation of booming Beijing music that reflects the current underground rock trends in a city of 15 million.”\(^{59}\) The web-site truepunk.com writes in their review: “While visiting Beijing in 2006 Martin Atkins found a surprisingly large and growing music underground unexpected to be found in China.”\(^{60}\) This “unexpected” “discovery” by the “prolific” Martin Atkins forms the outline of a story I think we have heard before; the story of a prolific Westerner, a master in his field, one who has taken it upon himself to seek out new unchartered territory. With his expertise at hand he will bring something back from this place so exotic and peculiar no one even thought it existed - a story not entirely different from the great discoveries and exotic endeavors depicted in the Orientalist literature of the nineteenth century.\(^{61}\)

\(^{58}\) Various artists *Look directly into the Sun – China Pop 2007* 2007, Bloodshot Records, IRC 600

\(^{59}\) Angela Zimmerman *Look directly into the Sun – China Pop 2007* 2007

\(^{60}\) Truepunk.com *Look directly into the Sun – China Pop 2007* 2009

\(^{61}\) Edward Said *Orientalism* 1978, PP.174-185
The outline presented here by these journalists is problematic because it gives the impression that these bands needed to be discovered. Someone, like Martin Atkins, who could actually understand their “real” worth was in some way destined to find them, implying that the bands themselves would not amount to any value until “we” discovered them. “We” needed to identify them within the context of our musical tradition. So, instead of doing the required research and familiarizing themselves with the Chinese music scene, these journalists have chosen to rely on an age old rhetoric - which, intentionally or not, coughs up what can only be described as an illusion of the “East.” This is an illusion of something immature and under-developed, which somehow needs “our” guidance to understand its own best.

I would argue that for a music-critic working in the period of 2007-2009 to get acquainted with contemporary Chinese rock would not be a huge problem. The flow of information on music has exploded on the Internet. English language web-sites dedicated to Chinese rock are easily available. Not to mention that many of the bands compiled on Look directly into the Sun have had web-sites, be it MySpace-pages and so on, which have been readily available for an international audience for several years. Some of them like the band Carsick Cars did also tour with the famous American group Sonic Youth in Europe in 2007.62 While Hang On The Box and PK14 gained notoriety for their concerts in the USA and Europe, prior to 2007.63 So, to label the music on Martin Atkins’ 2007 compilation as “unexpected,” or indeed to call it a “discovery,” is to my understanding unfounded.

I would argue that these words are used, because they are part of a tradition, a way of writing by “the West” on “the East.” Said has shown the width of Western scholarly and literate depictions of the East - pointing out how both scientific and literate texts contributed to form a discourse and a language for describing “the other.” This language has not run out of words, but is found, and used, both consciously and not, in clichés such as the abovementioned depiction of an “unexpected” “discovery” of a Chinese underground rock-scene.

My intention in pointing this out is of course not to demonize the individual critic or writer. This is meant to exemplify different ways in which a cultural hegemony is prolonged through writings in the popular media. Although coughing up old Orientalist phrasing might make for an interesting story, one can’t deny that a careless use of clichés such as that of an

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62 Asia Pacific Arts Talking and Listening - An Interview with Carsick Cars 2010
63 See: www.rockinchina.com
“undiscovered East” do in fact re-invigorate the power-hegemony of the active West - the
discoverer of a passive East. I would further claim that the prolonging of an uneven power-
relationship like this might ultimately stand in the way of any good understanding of Chinese
rock-music. This cultural phenomenon might not be fully understood on the mere basis of
Western discovery.

4.2 The Under-Developed “Other”

As mentioned, the compilation-album Look directly into the Sun has been reviewed by several
music-journalists online, among other Robert Christgau, who reviewed it on Rolling Stone
Magazine’s web-site in 2007.64 Christgau on his hand chooses to underplay the fact that the
album was compiled by Martin Atkins, he does mention it, but warns anyone to “assume this
one is different because the talent scout is PiL drummer Martin Atkins.”65 Christgau writes a
short review, and gives a fair amount of credibility to the bands represented. Nevertheless, he
still dismisses the collective effort as immature.

Christgau eyes an interesting dynamic within the modern metropolis Beijing. I quote:
“Venture into a city to record unsigned bands, and what you get is a whole lot of nothing in
no particular order. ‘The reason is the city: Beijing, 15 million strong, a hub of the kind of
thrilling, contradictory upward mobility that gets kids rocking.’66 Although he starts off in a
disillusioned manner, totally disregarding all the bands, (some of which he in turn goes on to
praise later in the review) he does however envision an interesting social dynamic conducive
of stirring up some good rock music. Christgau recognizes Beijing’s recent economic
development, and the growing economic divide between the people of the capital. He
contextualizes this with the common working-class background of many rock and roll greats;
like Elvis Presley, or even less fortunate artists like Little Richard, Muddy Waters and the
American blues-artists - all of whom laid the musical foundation for rock and roll as we know
it. Some of these artists eventually excelled artistically at a verging highpoint in Western
economy in the late 50’s and early 60’s. This presented possibilities for an upward mobility
which not long before was unthinkable. The comparison with the social dynamic arisen in
Beijing after the economic reforms is striking. Christgau does however exclude the compiled

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64 Robert Christgau Look directly into the Sun – China Pop 2007 2007
65 Robert Christgau Look directly into the Sun – China Pop 2007 2007
66 Robert Christgau Look directly into the Sun – China Pop 2007 2007
67 Robert Christgau Look directly into the Sun – China Pop 2007 2007
Chinese artists from having a full understanding of this historical development. He regards them as too immature to understand the complexities of their own society. Although Christgau himself has no problem pointing out importance of this social dynamic, the Chinese artists who in fact are partaking in this development are not yet ripe to understand their place in the big picture. He follows up on his quote on “contradictory upward mobility” with a final prediction: “These eighteen bands are too excited to explore their contradictions yet. “But that too will come.” Christgau is implying that these bands are not mature enough to understand their own position in recent historical development. The Rolling Stone writer has thus taken it upon himself to point this out to them, patronizingly predicting that they too will eventually understand. When predicting that these bands will eventually mature in the future, he asserts power over the topic by representing the Chinese bands as under-developed. He doesn’t strive to describe their musical expressions, but merely implies that they are currently either intellectually or culturally incapacitated to understand their own best. While assuming that in due time, (maybe after contemplating Christgau’s work, or other wiser, more well-informed sources) they might reduce this current cultural or intellectual gap. I would argue that this rhetoric only serves to strengthen a conceived cultural hegemony. By underlining the gap between his understanding of social-dynamics - and the Chinese artists’ lack of understanding - Christgau’s writing follows in a long tradition of cementing one’s own professional mastery by representing “the other” as less developed.

A somewhat similar tendency can for example also be found in diabolicalconquest.com’s 2008 review of the Chinese group Original Sin. This review also portrays a band that shows promise. It is written on the black-metal band: “Original Sin understand the technique of old Norwegian standards yet maintain a concrete sense of identity with their own idiosyncratic approach to that formula juxtaposed with a strong lyrical focus of urban decay.” Nonetheless, this sentence is directly followed up by “but ultimately what I see here is a heaping pile of potential, mostly still unrealized.” There is given praise to the bands understanding and approach to the black-metal genre, but they are still not fully developed to master what the reviewer regards as their musical intentions. It’s argued that Original Sin has some musical inadequacies. In addition, they are at one point depicted as “unique in their

68 Robert Christgau Look directly into the Sun – China Pop 2007 2007
69 Robert Christgau Look directly into the Sun – China Pop 2007 2007
70 Robert Christgau Look directly into the Sun – China Pop 2007 2007
71 Diabolicalconquest.com Original Sin – Misanthropic 2008
72 Diabolicalconquest.com Original Sin – Misanthropic 2008
73 Diabolicalconquest.com Original Sin – Misanthropic 2008
unoriginality.” This leads to some confusion on the band’s artistic qualities. The reviewer acknowledges a fresh approach to the genre, and praises that, but the freshness doesn’t quite seem to fit in with his ideal type of innovation. On these grounds the band is labeled as promising but “unrealized.” The reviewer’s argumentation makes it easy to ask a fundamental question: why does a group lack development just because they don’t easily fit into a fixed category? The confused rhetoric shows that it’s so much easier for this critic to dismiss the band’s effort as “unrealized,” as opposed to challenge his own ability to categorize.

Now, you can of course argue against my analysis, and claim that these writers are merely emphasizing that these bands in some way or another are promising, or, that they might have potential to evolve musically. But, this is a bit difficult, especially in Christgau’s case because he doesn’t address the matter in musical terms; he fits the bands into a historical context. And, of course, historical contextualization is indeed crucial to a good review or analysis, no doubt, but Christgau goes beyond this when concluding that these bands are “too excited to explore their contradictions yet.” When emphasizing that they are immature and need more time to evolve the bands are placed at a certain point on an imaginary cultural-evolutionary scale. He is implying that the bands need to evolve to a certain point before he as a professional can pinpoint any true artistic brilliance. Now, if we were discussing basic musical characteristics, or even technical ability, it might have been easier to argue with more concrete reference points. But, as Christgau has chosen to contextualize and represent Chinese bands within a social-historical development - rendering them on a cultural-evolutionary scale - it is made clear that the bands only means to success is to fit into the reviewer’s fixed conception of development.

If these bands need to evolve, by which means is this cultural-evolution supposed to be judged? Who is to determine what these bands need to become? Is it a given fact that there is one universal scale for cultural development? If so, then everybody should have a say as to who needs more development. It seems that there are many factors that might be smart to take into account when arguing how and why a band needs to develop. I don’t know if the abovementioned critics have done a good job when it comes to balancing this task, it is clearly possible to argue the opposite.

74 Diabolicalconquest.com Original Sin – Misanthropic 2008
75 Robert Christgau Look directly into the Sun – China Pop 2007 2007
4.2.1 Contrasting Representations

To contrast Robert Christgau’s Rolling Stone review it is interesting to have a quick look at Jakeb Smith’s PK14 review for Rave Magazine.\textsuperscript{76} Smith takes a brash approach, somewhat similar to Christgau, but this doesn’t stop him in challenging his own conceptions of how a punk-rock band should be. I quote: “Punks like to think themselves tough, alternative and against the system. Unfortunately, that shit gets a little disingenuous with equal access resources, uninhibited self-determination and the gentrification of city centres. Nanjing post-punks P.K.14 dodge that whole debate by being Chinese.”\textsuperscript{77} He continues: “not only do the band have lots of systemic abuses to complain about, but doing so is both anomalous and genuinely hazardous. Yet the best thing about P.K.14’s fourth studio album is that, for all the naming and finger-pointing they could rightly do, they don’t. Instead the band tell beautifully cinematic stories of urban life with strong undercurrents of melancholy and chaos.”\textsuperscript{78} Regardless of the brash style, common to the rock-review genre, Smith produces a language which reflects contemplation and analytic intent. Rather than predicting what a band needs to do to fit into a given model of development, the model itself is challenged - by a content that can’t simply be squeezed into familiar confines. Smith denotes a dynamic conducive of a certain development, but avoids predicting what “the other” needs to do to capitalize on this development.

A journalist is of course obligated to make critical commentary on the subject under review. But, seen in the recent social-historical context of China it is also easy to argue that Chinese bands, for quite some time, have had what they need to make good rock and roll. They have a musical foundation of Chinese rock, dating back to the early 80’s, readily at hand. (Not to mention the entire tradition of rock as it has developed in the rest of the world) And, they do have an understanding of the society they are living in - perhaps not an identical understanding as say, Robert Christgau, but an understanding nonetheless. Without this they would have had serious problems playing in bands, not to say functioning as human beings. So, to suggest that all the bands on the compilation-album \textit{Look directly into the Sun} are ignorant of their place in the world - or unable to harness the artistic influences available in their time - are harsh and very unconvincing accusations.

\textsuperscript{76} Jakeb Smith \textit{P.K.14 – City Weather Sailing} 2009
\textsuperscript{77} Jakeb Smith \textit{P.K.14 – City Weather Sailing} 2009
\textsuperscript{78} Jakeb Smith \textit{P.K.14 – City Weather Sailing} 2009
As seen, some critics do acknowledge Chinese contemporary rock as a result of musical and historical influences. But, an objective analysis would possibly have gained more insight from questioning how and why this music under these concrete circumstances has taken the form that it has - as opposed to delivering a patronizing prediction. I would argue that certain critics, like for instance Christgau, have relied on a well trod cliché - the discriminating cliché of representing developing countries as culturally and intellectually inferior to economically dominant countries. This is a tendency which Said shows (most elaborately in the case of the Near East, but also in the case of the Far East) is rooted in a tradition of defining “the other’s” inferiority on pre-conceived “truths.” As Said shows even those who were once brilliant “needed” Western authorities to explain what was best for them. As mentioned above, the goal of Napoleon’s intellectual elite venturing into Egypt wasn’t merely to further the study of Egyptian history - by gaining access to original sources and so on - ideally, it was to teach, or re-educate the Egyptians so that they themselves could have a chance of understanding the greatness of their own culture. Napoleon’s corps of Orientalists saw themselves fit to explain to the Egyptians the intricacies of ancient Egyptian culture, as if they didn’t know themselves. This was part in package of an arrogant manipulative power-hegemony which was established and reimbursed through the systematic production of knowledge on the “other.” This was in large part accomplished by forcing rigid systems of knowledge down upon wide-spanning social-constellations and hugely diverse cultural phenomenon - ultimately used to explain “their” truth by the means of “our” much greater understanding. 79 I would say that these are some interesting thoughts to ponder when reading for example diabolicalconquest.com’s Original Sin review, or Robert Christgau’s Rolling Stone review.

In this regard, there are some distinctions that might elude concrete analysis, but which I still feel should be clarified.

4.2.2 Western Authorities

First of all, it is important to clarify the role which a critic basis his authority. In the abovemention example Robert Christgau is a representative for Rolling Stone Magazine - a flagship in rock-journalism. To suggest that this authority represents the standards of Western rock of roll might in some way sound natural, but it deserves to be questioned. Firstly, to

79 Edward Said Orientalism 1978
reduce contemporary rock and roll to a “Western” phenomenon is far-fetched and highly essensializing. Marking rock as a “Western” phenomenon reduces the enormous artistic variety existent within the vast geographical areas know as the “West” into one all-encompassing term. It also excludes the enormous artistic variety developed outside this area. Although rock and roll originated in the USA, it spread fast to all corners of the world. From the late 1950’s to the early 1960’s the phenomenon underwent a massive blossoming commercially. The record industry made an enormous profit from selling rock music, and although North American and European rock-records at that point were scarce commodities in many places, there did nonetheless emerge bands in non-Western regions - bands that have shown to be extremely innovative and influential. As mentioned above, the American Forces Network was one important factor in the spreading of rock in East Asia. Both South Korean and Japanese jazz- and rock-groups were heavily influenced by the presence of American army personnel in the region. In the fifties and the sixties East Asian rock bands often catered to American audiences. Even outside the more obvious reach of US cultural imperialism there also emerged rock-groups. Several of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union had popular rock bands in the sixties. Alexander Gradsky (Born 1949) was the most recognized rock artist to appear in the USSR. He emerged as an artist when the cultural sphere was relaxed after Stalin’s death in 1953. Gradsky held his first solo appearance at thirteen in 1963, backed by a group called Tarakany. (The Roaches) He went on to play in a multitude of popular rock bands in the sixties, ultimately forming Skomorokhi (Jesters) in 1967 - “the first Russian group to play original songs in Russian.” In Brazil Os Mutantes (The Mutants) formed in 1966 and went on to record some vastly influential psychedelic rock albums in the late sixties, inspiring American artists of later decades such as Beck, and Nirvana. These are just some of many examples of how quick rock and roll spread and evolved in different, but succinct directions in widely divergent parts of the world. These examples help underline the share improbability and ignorance behind the dismissal of the over thirty year old tradition of Chinese rock as “under-developed” or “unaware.” It also questions the authority which is easily attributed to the flagships of the established music-press, like Rolling Stone Magazine.

80 Pil Ho Kim and Hyunjoon Shin The Birth of “Rok:” Cultural Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Glocalization of Rock Music in South Korea, 1964-1975 2010
81 Mark Yoffe and David Laing The History of Soviet and Russian Rock Music 2005
82 Mark Yoffe and David Laing The History of Soviet and Russian Rock Music 2005
83 Larry Rother MUSIC: Ignored for Decades, They’re Suddenly a Hot Band 2001
4.3 Contextualization

Of course, not all reviews are ignorant, or negligent when representing Chinese bands. There are plenty good reviews to be found on the internet. A really interesting example is the Australian company Tenzenmen which to some extent has devoted itself to spreading contemporary Chinese rock in Australia and beyond. Their web-page is a great resource, providing info, records, and record-reviews. They re-publish and offer links to a varied collection of reviews of Chinese rock-bands.\textsuperscript{84} Even though these reviews are compiled by a commercial company that sells Chinese music, you can’t deny the quality of some of the work they have gathered. Among other, they published a great review by Greg Yang for Crocsimplication.\textsuperscript{85} The review covers Snapline’s album \textit{Party is Over, Pornostar}. Compared to some of the social-historical predictions delivered above, this review is nuanced.

First the reviewer starts off with describing the instrumentation and the music it produces. He then proceeds to elaborate how this music relates to the socio-political setting in which it has been produced. This is what he does best. Yang writes: \textit{“the messages uttered by the cold voice (and its artificial echoes) describe morbid tales of urban discontent.”} \textsuperscript{86} He continues \textit{“this song attempts to break free of the repression of expression — the psychological and the social phenomenon more than the political oppression — associated with the new generations of materialistic youngsters.”} \textsuperscript{87} The music is contextualized within the confines of a socio-political understanding. The reviewer’s analysis highlights a discontent with the verging consumer society - a notion also expressed in other songs, such as Cui Jian’s \textit{Yi Wu Suoyou}. The musical qualities leave room for interpretation, and the reviewer analyzes the concrete expression on the basis of an understanding of the social-political context. Without predicting or judging if Snapline share his understanding or not, Yang proceeds to present a thorough interpretation which doesn’t discriminate the band nor provides any unbalanced political statement. Even though Yang’s language isn’t perfect, and his stylistic analysis may gladly have been longer, he does steer clear of literary clichés, and does a very good job of contextualizing Snapline’s album - both socio-politically and historically. He successfully blends a music-historical contextualization with socio-political contextualization. I quote: \textit{“Snapline explores the boundary between feeling and unfeeling. The same theme appeared at the center of psychedelic rock in the late 1960s on the foreground of the Vietnam war,}

\textsuperscript{84} See: www.tenzenmen.com  
\textsuperscript{85} Greg Yang \textit{Snapline} 2010  
\textsuperscript{86} Greg Yang \textit{Snapline} 2010  
\textsuperscript{87} Greg Yang \textit{Snapline} 2010
luxurious, careless spending, the wide inequity between classes and races, and internal suspicion in the US. Sound familiar, doesn’t it? China has now one of the highest gaps between the rich and the poor. Huge patches of land used for subsistence scatter throughout the country surrounding “beacons” of urbanization and cosmopolitan culture, which has increasingly centralized around “making money to make luxury.”

Yang could of course moderate some of the more enthusiastic language towards the end of his review, but this is nonetheless a rock-review, and big words are undoubtedly part of the genre. The thing that separates Greg Yang’s big words from the examples mentioned above is that he avoids writing the band into what you could call an established system of understanding. He points out the similarities between North-American and Chinese social- and musical-development, and uses this method to contextualize the band. He uses the genre-characteristics of the rock-review, without misusing representation. In doing so he avoids employing the band merely as a tool to re-affirm his own understanding.

Greg Yang also avoids judging Snapline solely on the basis of Western musical-references. This is a good quality in his writing. Certain rock-critics tend to exclusively compare Chinese bands to Western acts. Even if this does have some positive functions, it also entails certain problems.

4.4 Use of References

The tendency of exclusively using Western references can among other be seen in a review written by Noah Berlatsky for the website MadeLoud.com in 2009. He has also reviewed a Chinese compilation album; An Anthology of Chinese Experimental Music, 1992-2008. Considering that this compilation consists of four CD’s it would seemingly require a little work before presenting a comprehensive review. In this case the reviewer has gone to some lengths, but he is still fairly quick to dismiss the majority of the music compiled. The reviewer’s verdict is however not important in this case - what’s important is his argumentation is his use of references. What is striking with this review is the utter lack of reference to Chinese music. Berlatzky represents a tendency of exclusively using only non-Chinese, predominantly North-American and European references when describing and comparing Chinese songs. “Nara’s “Dream a Little Dream,” is very Aphex Twin; frantic

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88 Greg Yang Snapline 2010
blesps undergirding a melody that’s all lyrical bliss. Fathmount’s “A Yoke of Oxen,” on the other hand, suggests Sonic Youth,”⁹⁰ and so on. Both Aphex Twin and Sonic Youth have of course been hugely influential worldwide. And, being highly original acts, it has made them easy to recognize and effective as reference points. However, the tendency of using an excessive amount of Western references to describe Chinese music does undermine the objectivity and the depth of the review. Unfortunately, this tendency is quite common; among other you can see the same problem in Charles Drakeford’s 2008 Carsick Cars review, Bjørn Hammershaug’s 2005 PK14 review, and to a large degree in Andrew Schmidt’s 2009 Carsick Cars review.⁹¹ Schmidt’s review totals 17 comparisons with Western artists - in a review consisting of 15 fully composed sentences.⁹² No reference is made to Chinese artists. This method does basically leave the reader only to judge if these bands are good or bad copies of Western groups. This is a choice that severely restricts the outcome of any analytic interpretation. Now, American writers do of course first and foremost write for an American audience, Norwegian writers mainly write for Norwegian readers etc - making it understandable to use easily recognizable references. This doesn’t deny the fact that a lack of familiarization with the context which Chinese bands have developed will only lead to a limited understanding of their music. Exclusively comparing Chinese bands to Western bands will only give limited descriptive information, and it is hopelessly ignorant of the importance of local musical influences and musical interaction. A thorough method use of references might on the other hand help illuminate the obvious inadequacies of strictly applying a familiar system of classification – a method which in large part serves to reinvigorate a cemented system, as opposed to broadening the system’s boundaries.

4.5 “The Exotic” - Positive Orientalism

The use of positive Orientalism in reviews of Chinese bands is also interesting. As Richard King highlights in Orientalism and Religion, the use of positive clichés can also lead to the undermining of foreign cultural phenomenon. The positive use of Orientalist phrasing is found in a review of the Chinese metal-band Chun Qiu from 2008.⁹³ The reviewer makes several noteworthy comments on Chun Qiu’s record.

⁹² Andrew Schmidt Carsick Cars – Carsick Cars 2009
⁹³ Michael Robison Chun Qiu 2008
He is curious towards the metal-scene in China, and makes an interesting point in questioning the difference between this scene, and say, a Scandinavian or Japanese scene - underlining the strong international bonds within the metal-world.\footnote{Michael Robison \textit{Chun Qiu} 2008} After acknowledging the bands which Chun Qiu spurred from - noting how they are \textit{“on par with anything from the West,”} \footnote{Michael Robison \textit{Chun Qiu} 2008} he eventually comes to a point where he writes that Chun Qiu \textit{“has an exotic feel to it for certain songs, though not really Chinese.”} \footnote{Michael Robison \textit{Chun Qiu} 2008} This sentence is not entirely unproblematic. The reviewer equates “Chinese” with something “exotic.” Regardless of the band living up to what is “really” Chinese - the Chineseness denoted is related to a form of exoticism. What exactly this exoticism amounts to is however not pinpointed.

The use of the term “exotic” can be seen as a prolonging of a literary tradition of emphasizing “otherness.” This distinguishes “them” from “us.” It’s a method of using a positive trait to contrast alleged cultural differences. Though, using “exotic” to decipher what is “really” Chinese is somewhat farfetched, especially when the effort to explore this exoticism is nonexistent. Many might say that “exotic” isn’t exactly the most flattering description of a band masterfully conquering the challenges of their musical pursuits. But, the quality of the bands isn’t really the case here. The problem is equating “Chinese” with “exotic,” without even trying to define this exoticism. Maybe if the reviewer had challenged what this exoticism entailed this might indeed have made for an interesting observation. Up thru the ages there has of course been produced many representations of “exotic” Chinese phenomenon, both meaningful and not. This tradition in representation has in many ways made it expected to find some kind of exoticism when facing Chinese phenomenon. Not only China, but “the East” has become unanimous with “exotic.” Ralph P. Locke has studied exoticisms in music, (as mentioned above) Jane Ying Zha has also written an amusing text on the subject. She ponders why all her Western friends love Zhang Yimou’s films, while all her Chinese friends hate the films, accusing Yimou of \textit{“selling oriental exoticism.”} \footnote{Jane Ying Zha \textit{Excerpts from “Lore Segal, Red Lantern, and Exoticism”} 1993, P.329} Zha further notes a conversation with Lore Segal which led them to question if Chinese people become more political when seeing a film about themselves, especially while seeing it among foreigners. \footnote{Jane Ying Zha \textit{Excerpts from “Lore Segal, Red Lantern, and Exoticism”} 1993, P.329} The most of us are of course sensitive about how we are represented in the eyes of others. What Zha underlines is that the hunger for exoticisms is a well-known phenomenon, shared
by us all; making the term relative to the subjectivity of the source that utilizes it. In this way, “exotic” is often employed regardless and to the contrary of what the subject described feels fitting of themselves. What “exotic” actually amounts to is really hard to define. It can be interpreted in so many ways, from many diverse angles. This is also underlined by Isabel Santaolalla in her book “New” Exoticisms: Changing Patterns in the Construction of Otherness. Santaolalla also notes the exoticism as phenomenon is universal, but argues that no one has done a better job than the West when it comes to asserting cultural hegemony by defining their own perfection through the alleged imperfections of “the exotic other.”

Santaolalla bases her argumentation to a large degree on Said and Foucault. This beckons a warning for anyone who’s casually throwing out descriptions of something “exotic” that defines what is “really” Chinese. In regard to Robison’s review, it is a pity that the lackluster representation eludes an aspect which Robison finds interesting. “Exotic” is seen as a positive quality for the band, but the reviewer actually does a much better job of establishing authority over the subject, as opposed to striving for an objective examination the group’s “exotic” expression. In light of this you might see that a relative term like “exotic,” commonly used to refer to Chinese cultural phenomenon, has little value unless you venture into the qualities it is meant to denote – both as they are perceived in the eyes of the critic, and in the eyes of the subject under review.

As mentioned this analysis has no intention of demonizing the English written music-press. There are a vast amount of reviews of Chinese rock-bands that have been published on the internet, and many of them are very good. To illuminate difficult aspects of representing Chinese bands it is also very important to analyze why some reviews are successful in balancing representational tasks.

4.6 Fixed Categories

In a few of the examples above there has been put emphasis on the problems of fitting Chinese cultural phenomenon into fixed categories, and forcing “our” understanding onto “the other.” This is of course not always the case with every review of Chinese rock-bands. A very good method of avoiding these representational problems is to thoroughly analyze how the group at hand perceives themselves and their social-environment.

99 Isabel Santaolalla “New” Exoticisms: Changing Patterns in the Construction of Otherness 2000
100 Isabel Santaolalla “New” Exoticisms: Changing Patterns in the Construction of Otherness 2000, P.10
This can be exemplified among other with Tim Nordberg’s 2009 review of the Beijing based group White for consequenceofsound.net.\footnote{Tim Nordberg White – White 2009}

Nordberg first introduces a historical perspective by explaining different ways the color white has been used symbolically in Chinese culture. This gives some understanding as to why the band has chosen this name. White’s artistic history is then presented, their album output, producers and touring activity in Asia and in Europe. Nordberg then goes on to contextualize the noise-rock duo musically, establishing some balanced descriptive references for White’s musical expression. At this point the reviewer also mentions a problem facing White: “\textit{White are one of the first Chinese bands to make an impression in Western media - which unceremoniously dumps on White’s shoulders the responsibility of telling the world “what does Beijing sound like?” Pure? Unknown? Or in mourning?}”\footnote{Tim Nordberg White – White 2009} Although there are a number of Chinese bands making an impression in Western media, this is still a very good point – which targets a very important aspect of representation. Proposing that one band is going to represent the music of a whole country is of course preposterous, and frightfully unfair towards the band. A solid job is also done when elaborating how White’s musical expression can be interpreted in relation to their social and cultural surroundings. Nordberg eyes a re-contextualization of Western musical elements as they are imported to Beijing. This gives nuance to the topic of Chinese rock-bands utilizing Western musical elements. (An undertaking which sometimes is judged categorically in various degrees of good or bad) Nordberg gives some explanation as to how this re-contextualization has worked by showing the reader how these musicians see themselves in the midst of foreign influences. This is very effective. For example, he writes: “\textit{there’s also a good bit of English on White’s album.}”\footnote{Tim Nordberg White – White 2009} “\textit{Mirroring the trend for English-for-business, and the taking of English-sounding “business names” in China, “Conch Crunch” and “Build A Link” have just enough English to give the songs a slightly political edge: the former might well be (but in fact is not) a popular brand of Chinese snack, and the latter song comes on like a board meeting for a new English-language corporate slogan: “time alone left to think:/Build A Link/pushed too far on the brink/no one there to help to think:/Build A Link/Build…A Link}”\footnote{Tim Nordberg White – White 2009} As pointed out with the song \textit{Build A Link}, Nordberg shows that White has an understanding and an opinion of a contemporary Chinese social phenomenon; increased occupational competition – and its ensuing methods of
desperate self-promotion. Passing on knowledge of the artist’s own understanding of the zeitgeist, subtle as it may be, gives the review a much greater width. It illuminates the inadequacies of a critic which only relies on his own understanding of a socio-political context. Nordberg does a good job highlighting an aspect like this - and even though he loses some perspective by using far too many non-Chinese references, he does produce a good review.
5. Regional Differences

5.1 Historical Background

It is obvious that China and Japan’s historical backgrounds are different. In the context of this paper it is especially important to note the differences in political development since the 1950’s. While a communist regime took power in China from 1949, Japan established a post-war democracy outlined by US occupational forces. Led by General Douglas MacArthur the occupational forces were quick to strengthen the influence of American popular entertainment on Japanese society. The American Forces Network was a popular radio-channel for jazz and rock and roll, which supplied GI’s, and eager Japanese listeners with American popular music. By the turn of the 1950’s rock and roll was gaining a much wider acceptance among Japanese youth as opposed to the condemnation it received, on all levels, in pre-reform China. This led to an earlier development of rock in Japan. From the sixties and onward Japanese bands like The Spiders and The Mops were quick to find interesting ways of invigorating rock and roll. In this regard one can say that Japan had a head-start on China in developing a self-perpetuating scene for rock and roll. If this still has a large implication for bands playing today is a different question. It is tempting to argue that the accessibility of music and information over the Internet has at least become one important factor in diminishing any such head-start.

Seeing the abovementioned theories on Orientalism within the context of disseminating rock-reviews can be a helpful means of discursive analysis. Rock and roll - a highly active area of cultural activity opens possibilities for furthering the discourse on cross-cultural interaction. In this regard it is interesting to broaden the scope and explore a regional East-Asian perspective. With that purpose at hand I would like to have a quick look at some resent online reviews of Japanese rock-bands.

North-American and European rock-critics have reviewed a wide range of Japanese rock-bands online. There are a few interesting examples. Two Japanese bands that have been

105 Michael R. Auslin 150 Years of U.S.-Japan Relations 2004
106 Michael R. Auslin 150 Years of U.S.-Japan Relations 2004
108 See: http://60spunk.m78.com/spiders.htm and http://www.japrocksmplayer.com/artists/groupsounds/mops/
heavily reviewed in Western online music-press are the popular acts Guitar Wolf, and Shonen Knife. A wide range of reviewers have almost unanimously greeted the music of these bands with a solid nod of approval.\textsuperscript{109} But on which grounds is this approval gained? Which narratives laid the basis for the analysis of these albums?

5.2 Analysis of a Review of Shonen Knife

Take for example a review of Shonen Knife’s album “Free Time” which BBC published online in July 2011.\textsuperscript{110} This review is fairly positive towards the Japanese band. It commemorates their successful artistic history which spans over three decades and fifteen albums. Like many other Shonen Knife reviews the band is thoroughly compared to renowned American and European groups.\textsuperscript{111} Likewise, a list of iconic American rock-stars whom at one point or another have expressed admiration for Shonen Knife is meticulously proclaimed.\textsuperscript{112} Although BBC journalist Louis Pattison does show slight resentment towards namedropping the most common references, he nonetheless makes a long list of condoning rock-star authorities. Not to mention the deceased Seattle grunge-rocker Kurt Cobain; a seal of approval which in Shonen Knife’s case has been used to a point of exhaustion. This is exemplified in among other Greg Plato’s Shonen Knife band-biography for allmusic.com, Robert Collins concert-review for portcitylights.com, (fittingly entitled \textit{Cobain was Right: Shonen Knife Reviewed}) and in Stephen Maughan’s album review for rockfeedback.com, to name a few.\textsuperscript{113} The insistent overemphasizing of Cobain’s love for Shonen Knife has shown up in plenty reviews, creating a now all too common narrative. Pattinson thereby contributes in making it hard to conceive Shonen Knife as an independent entity unrelated to Cobain’s musical authority. Not entirely unlike the case of Martin Atkins mentioned above - Atkins being proclaimed a “discoverer” of seemingly non-existent Chinese bands. Cobain is similarly portrayed as the authority shouldering Shonen Knife. His authority anchors the artistic qualities of a band which Pattison cheerfully calls an “\textit{oriental oddity}. “\textsuperscript{114} In both cases the musical “other” is brought into existence for the Western audience through workings of

\textsuperscript{110} Louis Pattison \textit{Shonen Knife Free Time} 2011
\textsuperscript{111} See: Robert Collins \textit{Cobain was Right: Shonen Knife Reviewed} 2010, Stephen Maughan \textit{Shonen Knife – Free Time} 2011
\textsuperscript{112} Louis Pattison \textit{Shonen Knife Free Time} 2011
\textsuperscript{113} See: Greg Prato \textit{Shonen Knife} 2011, Robert Collins \textit{Cobain was Right: Shonen Knife Reviewed} 2010, Stephen Maughan \textit{Shonen Knife – Free Time} 2011
\textsuperscript{114} Louis Pattison \textit{Shonen Knife Free Time} 2011
masterful artistic authority – a force these East Asian bands would have a hard time existing without. (Seemingly) This brings into question the intention of this review. It might be difficult to see the review as willingly composed in order to further a perceived cultural dominance. But, the result of unconscious dabbling with worn-out references of “masterful authorities” does either way present a clear power-structure.

There is little doubt that Shonen Knife represents aspects of modern East Asian identity. Accordingly they undoubtedly deserve a serious effort to be understood – a process that requires more than namedropping. Regardless of any ulterior motive or agenda, it is unfortunate to base a representation on a constant re-telling of a single musical authority’s once proclaimed admiration. When this re-telling shapes a “truth” it leaves the band as a mere reaffirming element. The excessively over-used reference becomes more important than the subject it is supposed to give reference to. In this way there occurs a phenomenon strikingly similar to Said’s idea of “Orientalizing the Orient.”

5.3 Analysis of a Review of Guitar Wolf

Guitar Wolf is another popular Japanese band. Although they have gained much acclaim and gathered a cult following in the USA and in Europe, critics have still had some problems getting a grasp on how to portray them. There has even emerged explicit hesitation with even reviewing this band - all in the midst of an album-review.

In Hunter Felt’s review for the website popmatters.com he expresses a clear frustration over Guitar Wolf’s album Loverock, I quote: “I’m not entirely certain that Loverock, the latest slab of primitive rock and roll from Japan’s venerable Guitar Wolf, is, well, reviewable.”

“I find myself unable to really objectively rank it.”  “It could be that the only thing that one could compare a Guitar Wolf album to is another Guitar Wolf album.”

The hesitation expressed can be shared; reviewing a Guitar Wolf album is a challenging task. Though, in this case hesitation becomes an unconquered obstacle. The reason for mentioning this is not because Hunter Felt’s review is a bad review, on the contrary, all the reviews popmatters.com

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115 Hunter Felt Guitar Wolf: Loverock 2004
116 Hunter Felt Guitar Wolf: Loverock 2004
117 Hunter Felt Guitar Wolf: Loverock 2004
have done on Guitar Wolf have been insightful.\textsuperscript{118} Though, under further analysis they all share a common tendency; they’re all packed with superlatives, without once attributing this to a result of a conscious artistic effort. This deserves more attention.

Felt’s 2004 and 2005 reviews are good examples. As mentioned above, “hesitation” refers to Hunter Felt’s unwillingness to tackle the central contextual aspects of Guitar Wolf’s artistic intentions. He is frank, and as seen above, he willingly shares his distress. But, the results of his analysis are nevertheless not up to par when he bases his praise of Guitar Wolf on a presumed naivety, and “raw talent,”\textsuperscript{119} as opposed to artistic awareness. As Rolling Stone Magazine’s Robert Christgau criticized a lack of self-awareness in Chinese bands, Felt also portrays a lack of self-awareness in Guitar Wolf.\textsuperscript{120} Though, this time it is presented partly as a positive attribute. In Felt’s 2004 and 2005 reviews the Osaka band is rightfully compared to their most obvious musical peers; The Ramones and The Stooges. Their work is clearly related to these influences, but judging by Felt’s words, the band does indeed deserve to stand on their own feet; “Not being bound by a cultural history, as most garage rockers today are, they managed to produce a raw and angry sound without the sense of belatedness that affects most retro-rockers.”\textsuperscript{121} “Guitar Wolf artfully captured all the signifiers of rock and roll—witness their motorcycle gang outfits and matching sunglasses—but the band made a frightening and righteous noise that sounded like little else before them.”\textsuperscript{122} In other words, Guitar Wolf have successfully carved a place for themselves in the world of garage-rock. Their brilliance is however legitimized within a narrative of a naive, raw, almost barbaric creative outlet. Although playing a loud, fast, angry, and altogether uncompromising style of rock has gained them Hunter Felt’s praise, it is never clearly defined if Guitar Wolf’s artistic success is a result of artistic control or self-awareness. He is very hesitant in judging their level of artistic control, I quote: “Just when it seems that the band doesn’t know what it is doing and has decided to just be noisy, a guitar riff comes back at the proper time and Guitar Wolf reveal the lockstep musicianship buried underneath the shoddy attire of amateurism.

\textsuperscript{118} See: Hunter Felt 2004, Hunter Felt 2005, and Brian James 2005
\textsuperscript{119} Hunter Felt \textit{Guitar Wolf: Loverock} 2004
\textsuperscript{120} Hunter Felt 2004, Hunter Felt 2005
\textsuperscript{121} Hunter Felt \textit{Guitar Wolf: Loverock} 2004
\textsuperscript{122} Hunter Felt \textit{Guitar Wolf: Loverock} 2004
Then the guitarist launches an insane anti-solo, and there’s no way of quite understanding how in control Guitar Wolf actually is.” 123 This can of course be interpreted as genuine insecurity, but that does run contrary to Felt’s own arguments praising Guitar Wolf’s artistic consistency. 124 It therefore becomes problematic answering just why Felt feels inclined to doubt the band’s artistic control. Their consistent track record, spanning over a decade of making truly exciting work, isn’t enough to establish if they are actually in control of what they are doing. That is strange, I think.

I would argue that this forms a common outline of a well-known narrative; a story of an exotic raw talent, unexplainable but brilliant - a positive Orientalism proposing that the “other’s” artistic mastery is somewhat closer to magic, rather than a result of hard work and artistic awareness. Clearly relatable to Richard King’s writings on positive Orientalism, it is professed that Guitar Wolf has managed what many Japanese copy-cat bands have yet to muster; carving out a place for themselves among the greats of Western rock. Yet, how this was actually done is still presented somewhat as a mystery. 125 Even if everything points toward the opposite, Guitar Wolf’s artistic brilliance still remains unexplained to some extent. I would argue that Hunter Felt says more than enough. He makes a solid case of explaining Guitar Wolf’s consistent ability of producing good music. 126 As to why he hesitates to explore and articulate Guitar Wolf’s artistic awareness is hard to say.

One can argue that this is a means of constructing a familiar and exciting narrative of the untamed “other.” A narrative which tells us that despite a clear lack of self-awareness this Japanese band has miraculously managed to do just as well as we do. It sounds harsh - and I have no intention of demonizing Hunter Felt - but relying on a literary tradition of depicting the “other” as less aware of their own existence - even if this may be in the connotation of a positive “otherness” - this still produces an unbalanced picture of “Western” and “Eastern”

123 Hunter Felt Guitar Wolf: Golden Black 2005
124 Hunter Felt Guitar Wolf: Loverock 2004
125 Richard King Orientalism and Religion 1999
126 Hunter Felt 2004, Hunter Felt 2005
self-awareness. This aspect keeps Hunter Felt from delivering a thorough review. The goal of understanding the band’s creative intentions is partially ignored when fitting them into an unjustified cliché.

In this case, you might also ask yourself how constructive it is to doubt the band’s creative control. Many people may have doubted the artistic control of The Ramones - a group of social rejects with no formal musical education - but their creative output was nevertheless groundbreaking. And, as shown in Jim Fields and Michael Gramaglia’s excellent documentary-film *End of the Century*, The Ramones possessed military precision and a crystal clear concept of what they were doing - both creatively, and artistically as performers. Now, who’s to say if Guitar Wolf - critically acclaimed for making interesting music – isn’t in control of their own actions? Their consistent performance makes it hard to doubt. If doubted it certainly deserves further investigation. Especially when there are so many factors indicating conceptual and artistic control. In this case it is appropriate to ask why this Japanese band is represented as less understanding or less self-aware. Why is there presented a narrative which effectively serves to uphold and strengthen a cultural divide? The narrative might seem interesting, but, what it most clearly shows - is that the critic has asserted authority over the subject by questioning their artistic self-awareness. This effectively reimburses cultural hierarchy by passing the “other” off as naive, unaware, and lucky - rather than skillful. This is reminiscent of tendencies Said highlights in his analysis of representations of the “other” in Western history of literature.\(^\text{128}\)

Reviews of Japanese rock-bands are plentiful, and varied. There is therefore needed a serious effort to establish any reliable tendencies on the reception of Japanese rock in English-written music-press. These are just a few examples related to my area of investigation. There is so much more to discuss.

\(^{127}\) Jim Fields and Michael Gramaglia *End of the Century* 2003
\(^{128}\) Edward Said *Orientalism* 1978
5.4 Representations of East Asian Rock-Groups

While comparing it is tempting to draw tentative lines between representations of contemporary Chinese and Japanese rock-groups. As seen in some of the abovementioned examples there are some similarities; the most common might seem to be the problem of exclusively comparing East Asian bands to Western groups - as can be exemplified by critics Berlatzky, Schmidt, Pattinson and Collins above. Their use of references does carry a risk of misrepresentation. In the worst case, an unbalanced representation like these might strengthen the literary tradition that has asserted cultural hegemony by judging foreign cultural product solely by “our” systems of interpretation. As shown above, there have also occurred questionable representations of both Chinese and Japanese bands being under-developed or unaware of what they are actually doing.

While barely touching the tip of the iceberg when doing this study, there is definitely room to further challenge these tendencies.

Why are East-Asian musicians sometimes represented as naively subsumed with what you might call the amusement- and entertainment-value of rock? And, if so, which elements are coupled with this notion to rule out self-awareness and artistic purpose? While quality-approval and deep reflection are easily accessible resources for Western critics, they are sometimes hard to find in representations of East Asian bands. Sometimes, a seemingly inherent “greater understanding” is haphazardly deployed when casting a verdict down upon a subject. In that way it is often assumed that the reviewer knows more about the band than the band do themselves. This is visible in the examples of Robert Christgau and Hunter Felt seen above. And, as argued above, this does curtail some seriously unfortunate consequences. Just how consequences like these differ internally in the East-Asian region is extremely interesting - it deserves future attention.
6. Conclusion

Throughout this project it has become evident that the notion of Orientalism as Said defined it still is relevant. Although some aspects of his writings deserve to be questioned, I do argue that his theory is meaningful when studying contemporary cross-cultural representations. Said’s reading of Foucault and Gramsci gives a solid foundation for gaining understanding on how power-structures are established within discourse.

In the context of rock and roll, many might of course find it hard to stake out and condemn a rock-critic for spearheading cultural domination. You might say that claiming cultural hegemony conflicts with the goal of making rock-music universal. The genre is often seen as a tool for emancipation from the confines of establishment - especially in light of the genre’s development since the late 1960’s. Even if cultural domination was intended, proposing a witch-hunt on critics would definitely not be very beneficial. Opinions are fuel for understanding; they always make an impact, and are seldom unwanted. Not to analyze the rhetoric and argumentation shaping opinions would therefore be a cardinal sin.

Taken the wide notion of freedom that has emerged within the rock-genre since the late 1960’s - the peacefully striving for common understanding, coupled with the inherent elements of revolt and danger – do make the genre a difficult arena for judging those who judge, so to speak. Rock and roll and rock-journalism both have an inherent unpredictability. And, that’s not a bad thing. Even if this sometimes makes it harder to grasp what critics actually mean. If they actually mean anything at all - in the worst cases, album-reviews can become a heap of slang and recycled catch-phrases - and if you’re lucky this hodgepodge is dripped in a thick coat of misleading reference-pornography; “Envision Wanda Jackson stumbling into an after party with Cradle Of Filth, Frankie Goes To Hollywood, and Bob Dylan, and they’re all about to blow up!” etc, etc. Point in case is - that chasing an exciting narrative might often lead to an unfortunate use of literary clichés. As shown in the examples above, there are certain cases where journalists (including those writing for acclaimed
magazines) neglect the task of providing even the most basic descriptive analysis. Instead, a mix of age-old clichés and pop-cultural tag-lines is utilized to catch the reader’s eye. In the case of journalists covering Chinese bands, the problem is - as I have tried to show in my analysis - that a lot of these unproven clichés, assumptions, and prejudice stem from a literary tradition that effectively asserts an assumed cultural hegemony. “We” write about “them”- to a large part explaining what the “other” somehow is incapable of comprehending themselves. As shown above, this isn’t always printed in capital letters. I have therefore tried to present a set of examples that highlight various important representational aspects.

Some of the similarities between the representation of Chinese and Japanese bands has also been shown. It would be extremely interesting to widen the regional scope and examine Korean rock’s reception in Western media. Now that great scholarly work such as Pil Ho Kim and Hyunjoon Shin’s writings are helping spread interest - and Korean rock’s availability is increasing in the USA and Europe - it would be interesting to make an inter-regional comparison of the tendencies examined here.

If there is any doubt as to why this exercise is important, there are a couple of key aspects that I hope have come to light in this paper. First of all, I have tried to show that the Western tradition of depicting the “other” (be it the “Oriental,” the “Chinese” or the “Japanese”) as a second-hand consumer of cultural understanding still exists in contemporary writings. Even if extremities such as the racist lyrics of Florentz Siegfried’s Kid Boots luckily are hard to find, there are nonetheless examples where Chinese musicians are represented as not fully understanding the cultural development of their own society. This is food for thought, especially at this point in time. We have recently seen a decline of power in the major record-labels, and an emergence of an increasingly influential base of smaller independent companies. The flow of music on the Internet, mixed with the revolution in reasonably priced digital recording equipment, has also made it much easier getting music spread out on a global scale. This development has gone hand in hand with a democratization-process in music-journalism. This has resulted in an emergence of countless web-sites covering every genre of rock. Those
who used to print fanzines in their garage are publishing their work online, just as easily as the magazines backed by the media industry. At this point in time when accessibility has increased massively it is crucial to understand the impact of writing - especially in cross-cultural interactions. Of course, there has always been good and bad journalism, (as well as various degrees of successful editing) but, I would like to stress that when it comes to contemporary English-written music-journalism covering East-Asian rock-groups there is reason to assert awareness. Examples like those shown above do have a wide-range of implications. And frankly, some of the representations are just not up to par. Not only have Western audiences come to expect more in a review - age-old stereotypes and prejudiced clichés are seldom taken as good reading – in addition, the East-Asian audience is also a growing mass of readers. Increased accessibility isn’t merely a Western phenomenon; it has had an enormous impact in China and in other East-Asian countries. So who’s to say what Chinese readers are expected to make of the Orientalist representations presented in these album-reviews? With China constituting the largest mass of internet-users per country in the world, this is worth taking into consideration. Chen Xiaomei’s criticism of Said underlines that there is no reason for ignoring China as a passive recipient. It would, on that note, be very interesting to have a look at the reception these representations might have gained in China.

As shown above, there are several factors that open for a legitimate questioning of the authority backing certain representations of Chinese bands. A lot has happened since Elvis popularized African-American “race-music.” Since then the ongoing development of rock, and rock-journalism, has gained theoretical authority from an established music-press - which in turn has shaped a dominant discourse. It is not inevitable that this dominance will decrease. The misrepresentation of Chinese bands is one good reason for seeking balance to this discourse.
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