Deconstruction and reconstruction of identities: An interpretation on Chinese agriculture metal

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Abstract
After the advent of Black Sabbath in the late 1960s, metal has existed for nearly 50 years. With the trend of cultural globalization from the West and opening-up of China in the late 1980s, metal emerged in the country in 1990 and then became a genre around 2000. The forming of Chinese metal has been experiencing a tension of acculturation, in which background agriculture metal came about as an exclusively Chinese metal phenomenon around 2010. Instead of being merely a spoof, it refers to deeper implications and reflects the issues of Chinese identity in a cosmopolitanism context. This article explores the origin and formation of the phenomenon of “agriculture metal” (农业重金属) and argues that the illogicalness, absurdity, and modern cynicism produced by agriculture metal can be understood as a deconstruction of traditional Chinese culture, mainstream popular culture, and Western metal orthodox, through which a series of unique features of Chinese metal are possibly constructed or reconstructed. This study may enrich contemporary metal studies by focusing on Chinese metal, which has usually been absent in the academia. More significantly, it emphasizes the tension between Chinese metal (localization) and Western metal (globalization), especially the former’s identity struggle in the global metal scene. Meanwhile, this study might be of more universal application, illustrating one of the possible results in the cosmopolitan process of culture in the contemporary world.

Keywords
Agriculture metal, cosmopolitanism, identity

The considerable cosmopolitanism of metal since the new millennium inspired a rising interest in global metal studies, which focused more on the metal phenomenon of those peripheral regions and countries usually overlooked in the previous seminal writings of Weinstein (1991) and Walser...
(1993), such as Avelar (2003) on Brazil, Kahn-Harris (2000) on Israel, Baulch (2007) on Indonesia, LeVine (2008) on Islam, Hecker (2005, 2010, 2012) on the Middle East, Weston (2011) on Basque countries, and the collected publication *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World* (Wallach, Berger, & Greene, 2011). In this climate, studies of Chinese metal began to attract academic attention, from discussions on local individual artists (Wong, 2011) to topics around identity, globalization, and localization in the Chinese metal scene (Wang, 2015, 2017; Zheng, 2016). There should be a consensus that metal, as a culture, was not originally rooted in China but was totally transplanted. Regev (2013, p. 5) summarizes the paradigm of cultural globalization as a three-way circuit: (1) cultural materials that originated in the West flow into non-Western countries as models of modernity, (2) the non-Westerns selectively adapt elements and components from those materials and merge them with indigenous traditional materials, (3) the non-Western cultural products created in such way flow back to the West with some influences and inspirations. Furthermore, according to his concept of esthetic cosmopolitanism, the current world is undergoing an innate force generated from the tension between globalization and localization to unify different artistic praxis into “one,” such as what has happened in Pop-rock (Regev 2013, p. 9). Thus, Chinese metal has been necessarily evolving and developing in a tension between the Western metal orthodox and Chinese traditions.

**Identity, Chineseness, and Chinese metal**

When discussing the identity of popular music, Negus (1996, p. 99) proposed an insightful question: “Do we have a core personality or ‘nature’ that remains unchanged over time or do we take on, acquire or simply make up and adopt new characteristics throughout our life?” He, in fact, pointed out that many widely used identity labels such as Chinese metal could be problematic as there was and would be no absolute stability and fixed coherence between certain social groups and particular musical sounds (Negus, 1996, p. 100). In other words, identity should be better considered both ascribed and inscribed, something which is not essential, given, and fixed but understood from a more dynamic perspective as actively constructed and always open to further change (Negus, 1996, p.133). As Wang (2017, p. 147) observed, Chinese metal has been evolving from the first wave of the heavy rock era (1990–1996) to the transitional Nu-metal movement (1997), to the second wave of the extreme metal era (2000–2013), and then to the more recent folk metal, showing constant changes of styles, subgenres, and identity features.

Theoretically, the so-called “Chinese metal” should be defined as metal music culturally containing, carrying, and reflecting the “Chineseness,” rather than the music simply created and played by Chinese people. “Chineseness,” in the broad sense, means the essentials that define someone or something as “Chinese.” Considering the modernism context, Chineseness is also presented in the pursuit of reconstructing the “Chinese subjectivity” from the interaction between Western modern civilization and Chinese traditions (Zhang, 2018, p. 35). In practice, this term has been widely used in various contexts of politics, history, culture, and economics (Li, 2014). By highlighting its historical, cultural, and esthetic attributes, this article defines the term as those core factors that make metal Chinese metal,1 such as the traditional elements employed by Chinese metal musicians discussed below.

Metal in China is a transplanted culture forged by both globalization and localization. Such interaction has been often presented in different ways throughout its history. In 1990, when the *Tang Dynasty* (唐朝), honored as the first metal band of mainland China, introduced this new form of metallic sounds inherited from the 1980s’ classic heavy metal (including the distorted guitar timbre,
power chords, palm-muted technique, riff-based structure, virtuoso solos, long hair, leather, and wild stage performance),
they had also successfully presented a traditional esthetic pursuit of “Wen Wu Shuang Quan” (文武双全, a balance of cultural refinement and martial ability; Wong, 2011, p. 64). Subsequently, the following decades witnessed a greater range of efforts to make Chinese metal, musically, thematically, lyrically, or graphically.

For instance, *Again* (轮回) (1995) employed the traditional instrument Chinese lute in the prelude of the song *The Flames of Yangzhou Path* (烽火扬州路); *Narakam* (冥界) (1997) quoted an excerpt from the Beijing Opera *The Red Lantern* (红灯记) in the single *The Nightmare Is Going On* (噩梦在继续); *Spring Autumn* (春秋) (2006) composed the whole melody of *Mountains and Seas* (山海间) based on traditional musical modes; The lyrics of *Stale Corpse* (陈尸) (2000)’s *Fu Xi* (伏羲) (an ancient Chinese god) were thoroughly derived from *The Twenty-Four Solar Terms of ancient China*; all the cover arts of series compilation *Resurrection of Gods* (众神复活) (2001, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2013) featured a strong Chinese sense, including the Buddhism, traditional architecture, ancient warriors, Chinese landscape painting, paleography and calligraphy, and dragon (Wang, 2017:, pp. 182–185). The ambient black metal band *Zuriaake* (葬尸湖) (2007) made their isolated and pessimistic feelings in the costume of bamboo hats and straw rain capes, which were typically linked to the nostalgic image of a lonely fisher. Perhaps, the highest form of this attempt thus far was the subgenre of Chinese folk metal that emerged in the early 2010s, such as inner Mongolian band *Nine Treasures* (九宝) (2013), which referred to nearly all the aspects mentioned above to demonstrate their ethnic identity characteristics as one organic unit.

These praxis proposed a basic pursuit of forming “Chinese metal.” This was also the background against which agriculture metal occurred and took a step forward. To establish the Chinese identity in metal calls for not only a sort of cooperation (such as the process of constantly applying a variety of local and traditional elements), but also struggle for redefining the cultural identity with the deepening of cosmopolitanism and arousal of native consciousness. In the early 2010s, agriculture metal, as an informal concept, was first used exclusively by Chinese metal fans with a sense of humor, and soon became a weird and unique phenomenon in the local metal and pop music scene (it does not exist in the Western or global metal scene at all4). However, instead of being merely a spoof, it more seriously reflects certain attitudes and identity struggles of Chinese metalheads in the modern and global contexts. Logically, examining agriculture metal started as a part of the project of metal studies, then moved to more significant sociocultural studies about the country’s contemporary cultural identities. This means agricultural metal can be investigated, theoretically, from the angles of ethnicity, geography, history, economy, social classes, migrant, generations, gender, and so on. Considering the more practical factors such as the author’s personal theoretical background and the length of the article, the core questions focused are: (1) how agriculture metal presents the sense of Chineseness musically and ideologically, (2) how agriculture metal reflects Chinese metal musicians’ reaction to the long-term process of metal globalization and its relevant orthodox, and (3) how agriculture metal helps to build the mechanism of identity reconstruction of Chinese metal.

Given that these questions have never been discussed in academic writings before, the following paragraphs explore the origin of the term in its relevant contexts and demonstrate its highly Chinese connotations. Furthermore, the meanings and motives behind the phenomenon are revealed via a textual analysis of the sample titled *Everything Dies* (万物死) by *Yunmbi* (云母逼). Finally, the article concludes with a mechanism of identity suspension, deconstruction, and reconstruction, which illustrates a predicament and uncertainty of reconstructing Chinese identity in metal music and the broader contemporary pop culture.
Coining the term agriculture metal

The term “agriculture metal” was coined around 2010 by a few Chinese metal fans, but it is impossible to exactly clarify the inventor of the term. Immediately, the term was widely spread on the Internet and its meaning was largely extended. Therefore, as a collectively folk creation, its definition has been vague and is often used for fun outside a serious consideration. Therefore, a few core connotations and references must be examined before a clearer definition can be made.

1. Agriculture metal is a mocking expression to describe a number of local mainstream popular hits on the Internet, especially represented by the pop group Phoenix Legend (凤凰传奇). These songs are usually very easy listening with catchy melodies, simple rhythms, and cheap fashionable elements that are widely accepted and embraced by the general public, particularly by people in the rural and town areas. Due to their considerable popularity, they tend to be despised as being of “low taste” (低俗), “rustic” (土), and even “stupid” by certain groups that are interested in relatively alternative and indie genres. In such atmosphere, metal fans expressed their disdains in a comic way, so came the term agriculture metal. Subsequently, the term was expanded to refer to all the inferior products of pop music. There was evidence showing that the term had spread nationwide, and its derogatory implications were widely realized. For example, in an interview when being asked about their response to being marked as agriculture metal, Zeng Yi (one of the members of Phoenix Legend) felt insulted and responded angrily to the reporter: “What do you mean? What is agriculture? What is metal” (Yangcheng Evening News 羊城晚报, 29 Oct 2012)?

2. The term can be understood as a self-ridiculing counterpoint to the term industrial metal in the Western metal context. Considering the innate nature of China in its 3700-year history as an agricultural country and the prominent roles of the peasantry class in the foundation of New China (PRC) in 1949 and later socialism movements, agriculture had undoubtedly become one of the most significant ethos and symbols of Chineseness, standing for the most native stuff. The reason for self-ridiculing mainly lies in the different levels of productive forces between the agricultural and industrial civilization in modern societies from a Marxist perspective, which admits that China is still less developed or advanced compared with the West. In this sense, the term may be not only necessarily of relevance to metal music but also an esthetics of rustic culture (土味文化). For example, when searching “agriculture metal” (in Chinese) on YouTube, no metal songs are obtained in the results but a few pop music with local folk elements with relatively low quality, less musicianship, or outdated fashion.

3. Notably, a more apparently metal-related inspiration might come from a German metal band Farmer Boys whose name has shown an explicit link with agriculture. Although the band’s music was not unusual, combining groove metal (such as Machine Head) and gothic metal (such as Paradise Lost), most of their lyrics extraordinarily revolved around animal husbandry but from an abnormal angle, such as bestiality in Farm Sweet Farm, torture of animals in When a Chicken Cries for Love, suicide in Relieve the Tension, and slaughter-houses in When Pigs Fly. With the increasingly popularity of Nu-metal and later metal-core, Farmer Boys became known by more Chinese metal fans, who initiated to informally mention the band as farmer metal or agriculture metal.

4. Agriculture metal was the title of a local pop single by A Bao & Mountain Flower Band (阿宝和山花乐队) in 2014. As a grassroots singer growing up in a rural area of Shanxi province, A Bao gradually made his fame as a popularized eco-folk artist after winning the
champion of the CCTV (China Central Television) singing contest *Star Boulevard* (星光大道) in 2005. To a large extent, his success was based on the unique indigenousness or authenticity of his rural identity of northwest China. In 2014, when this identity encountered metal music, an unexpected result came about as the hit *Agriculture Heavy Metal* (农业重金属). The music featured many essential stylistic characteristics of metal such as distorted guitar and power chords. Meanwhile, the lyrics explicitly contained verses like “I love heavy metal” and “the grooves of agriculture heavy metal make me feel so good.” Indeed, the song could be no more than a commercial gimmick for self-promotion. Yet, it objectively created a link between the concept of “agriculture metal” and physical metal-style music, in which a Chinese identity of rustic culture was enhanced.

5. An underground compilation album titled *Shi* (shit) released in 2012 might eventually claim a particular normalized music style of agriculture metal. The album was released by the label self-called *Agricultural Civilization*, and the style was also self-marked as agriculture metal although not all the songs were metal. Specifically, the compilation consisted of 18 songs from 12 bands and artists, which could be hardly appreciated in normal aesthetic conventions of either pop or metal. For example, track No. 4 *Home Again without You* (爱上一个不回家的人) was the cover of a famous love ballad in 1990 by Sandy Lam, while the new version was adapted into a hotchpotch in which various styles including metal were mixed together. Track No. 12 featured the whole melody of *Lake of Fire* by *Meat Puppets* in 1984 (or maybe the more well-known cover version by Nirvana in 1994), replacing the original lyrics with a repeating verse of *Every time I touch my nipples* (每当摸起自己的乳头). More ridiculously, track No. 1 began with merely one sentence quoted from a Chinese cartoon song *Black Sergeant* (黑猫警长), followed by a set of meaningless and non-melodic yell. In general, these works collectively reflected and exemplified a set of stylistic characteristics and esthetic attitudes in the name of agriculture metal, including disorderly structure, illogical lyrics with dirty language, collage of existing works, inferior singing technique, intentional absurdity, and ideology of modern cynicism. In August 2015, the Ministry of Culture announced to ban 120 songs from the Internet after deeming them as promoting “obscenity, violence, insubordination, or immorality” to the society (CNN, 2015). The actual blacklist could be much bigger. Maybe for the same reason, the album has been unavailable on the Internet in mainland China since around 2016. Notably, the most noteworthy tracks in the compilation were contributed by *Yumbi*, which will be specifically discussed in next section as a case study.

6. Examining the online resources, the entry titled *Encyclopedia of Agriculture Metal* posted in July 2009 on Douban.com declared that “The 21st century will be the era of agriculture metal … as a rising force, it is replacing traditional music.” Meanwhile, agriculture metal was defined as “A new metal style/subgenre that uniquely derived from China, based on traditional heavy metal, melodic death metal, and melodic black metal, combined with the elements from Chinese opera, folk songs, and ethnic minority music.” Moreover, the stylistic characteristics were summarized as “the melodies come from folk tunes with an amount of electronic effects; the percussion imitate the sounds of agricultural equipment; the bass timbre sounds like cattle, and the guitar like horse, occasionally with cockcrow and quack; the vocals are similar to extreme metal; the headbanging is often highly fast reaching 360 times per minute; the riffs are structured on a weird logic usually with atonal solos.” Finally, a few pop and rock artists such as Lee-hom Wong, Bob Dylan, *AC/DC*, *Farmer Boys*, Vitas, and so on were listed as the relevant representatives. From a serious perspective, most of
these explanations did not make sense at all, but were for fun. Similar remarks were also found in the entry of agriculture metal in BaiduEncyclopedia. The difference was that the latter clearly admitted that the term, mostly, was created and used non-seriously and even meaningless. However, it also proposed that it could be potentially developed into a more serious style/subgenre to mention those metal artists who intentionally apply local, indigenous, or original ecological elements.

All the factors above illustrate that the term agriculture metal should be considered in a multiple social context, shaped by different layers of cultural conflict. First, as a form of metal, it is an outcome of the tension between Western and Chinese metal practice. Second, “agriculture” metaphorically connotes an increasingly significant issue of class differentiation and solidification in Chinese society. Furthermore, its “rustic” esthetics reflects a contradiction between the elegance and vulgarity in the contemporary popular culture of China. Finally, the generalization of the term shows a new negotiation between the local metal and non-metal fans in the Internet era. Instead of being seriously defined, these conflicts are expressed in a sense of ironic and absurd.

In his historical observation on Chinese metal, Wang (2017, pp. 132–133) argues that after metal as a genre was formed around 2000, almost all the important subgenres emerged in the following decade, such as death metal, black metal, grindcore, thrash metal, folk metal, and metalcore. Although many metal musicians of these subgenres employed local elements to make the music more “Chinese,” the basis of Western metal orthodox was never challenged. In other words, Chinese metal still underwent as a practice of learning, imitating, and creating to a certain degree. However, agriculture metal is different in this point, it is (at least not yet) neither a subgenre nor a style in any strict sense. Instead, it is more like a still-forming movement and subversive attitude from its initial funniness toward seriousness. Thus, this article defines agriculture metal as a unique phenomenon in the Chinese metal scene which presents certain stylistic and esthetic features and, at the same time, evokes a collective memory or image of the peasantry and rustic culture of traditional China. More significantly, this phenomenon indicates a struggle for Chinese identity in metal practice in the global metal scene.

**Textual analysis on Everything Dies by Yumbi**

Yumbi was initially an ordinary rock band formed in 2009 in Beijing. The two original founders came from the Tungus ethnic minority, so they named their band in Tungusic language as “Yumbi” which signified “inclusiveness” or “drowned.” After becoming tired of the “boring” rock, they began to approach toward an attitude of playing music with a sarcastic attitude and postmodern techniques of playfulness and parody, and finally defined the core characteristics of agriculture metal as an actual sort of metal music rather than an ambiguous idea (as examined above). Unfortunately, affected by the aforementioned blacklist action, all the works of Yumbi have been unavailable online since 2016, and then the band also became inactive. Meanwhile, agriculture metal also became a less popular and talked about topic in the local metal scene. In the recent years, there has been no famous band that self-claims as agriculture metal or relevant outstanding works.

In the strict sense, there might be no “composition” instead, they used existing materials to make music by approaches of collage and montage. These materials were obtained from a big range of almost all kinds of popular music throughout the world, and selected and mixed into
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a basic sound background of punk, metal, or grindcore. Eventually, the band became increasingly popular after the two singles included in the compilation Shi in 2012 and the self-released album titled The Works of Yumbi in 2014. Another noteworthy behavior of Yumbi was that they intentionally kept their true identities a mystery. For example, in most online media, the real names of the members never appeared and their activities were also described in a metaphorical way (which will be discussed later). Everything Dies, as a magnum opus of the band, very well illustrates how their songs were created (or more exactly, made) musically, lyrically, and graphically. The sample is excerpted from the compilation Shi, track No. 18 (http://abayumbi.milepub.cn/).

Musical collage

In terms of the musical structure, the song consists of three main parts (see Figure 1). The intro part is a complete copy of the intro section from a popular world music work Alive (万物生) by Sa Dingding (萨顶顶). Notably, the titles of the two songs also show a deliberate opposition, which in Chinese literally means “everything is alive” and “everything is dead,” respectively. The prelude part features an originally composed metal riff. The rhythmic syncopation and short melody based on Phrygian mode make the part a particular exotic and metal flavor. The main body of the song is a musical adaptation of the aforementioned pop hit The Most Dazzling Folk Style by Phoenix Legend, in which the main tunes, chord progressions, and basic rhythmic patterns are maintained but rearranged in a different structure and played in a typical metal style, such as power chords, distorted guitar, tapping solo, even double bass (3’:01”- 3’:08”), and blast beat (3’:09”-3’:14”). At the same time, the vocal is quite close to a punk style featuring untrained, rough, aggressive, and off-key in a rough recording quality.

Lyrical montage

The lyrical materials are excerpted from different hits and stacked together like a montage. Although all of these lyrics are slightly changed, the corresponding original songs are still highly recognizable. According to the lyrical analysis, there are 30 songs involved, referring to 30 different artists from eight regions of the world such as China, South Korea, and the United States, and at least 15 genres/styles such as rock-pop, punk, and metal. It is important to point out that there is
no clear semantic logic or coherence among these lyrical fragments. Instead, they tend to be arranged randomly and in a few occasions rhyme is taken into account.

**Graphical illegibility**

Graphically, the Band’s logo, as shown below, is designed quite like a combined animal head of cattle (eyes), buck (antlers), and goat (beard; Figure 2). Meanwhile, the linear features, structural symmetry, and illegibility tend to be easily confused with the logos of extreme metal, especially black metal. In doing this, a subtle connection between agriculture and extreme metal is created, but at the same time, neither is truly clear.

Similarly, the band’s stage performance and appearance were partly metal/extreme metal, but did not thoroughly obey the standards. As the images obtained from the live video of *Everything Dies* in 2014 illustrated, the appearances, costume, and stage movement of the vocalist and bassist were typical metal, while the other members hardly show any direct relations. More significantly, in the second image the standard metal gesture was changed from the index and little fingers to the ring and little fingers, which claimed a deliberate deviation from the traditional metal orthodox (Figure 3).

From the above, *Everything Dies* shows a strong sense of illogicalness, absurdity, and modern cynicism, which very well fits the definition of agriculture metal provided in the previous section. More specifically, in this work, (1) the artist’s “self” is metaphorically concealed; (2) a part of the essential and typical metal stylistic conventions are maintained and rearranged; and (3) the standards of mainstream pop music and Western metal orthodox are intentionally deviated.
Suspension, deconstruction, and reconstruction of Chinese metal's identity

Derrida (1982) uses the concept of deconstruction to reconsider the relationship between text and meaning. As one of the core ideas, he proposes that a concept must be understood out of its original context but of its opposite (p. 26) and reminds us that the nihilistic or cynical position resulted from the deconstruction should be not the end but new meanings must be reconstructed in such process (Derrida, 1982, p. 42). By referring to Derrida’s theory, “deconstruction” is understood in this article as an action of “cut off” between the text and its original context and therefore the original meaning produced by them is lost. The musical, lyrical, and graphic deconstruction resulted in a confusion of identity of the band and their music. Specifically, this reconstructing process works in three stages: suspension, deconstruction, and reconstruction.

Figure 3. The stage appearance of Yumbi, Images obtained from https://www.bilibili.com/video/av8467107?from=search&seid=15066059490096713546.
In the first stage, the personal identities of the band are hidden by means of using nicknames and metaphorical biographies on their profile page on Douban and other online social media. Moreover, the musical identities of the band are also ambiguous due to that *Everything Dies* refers to so many works of different genres or styles that they cannot be definitely defined as any existing genre or style. Furthermore, it is nearly impossible to figure out what ideas, attitudes, or meanings they were conveying because the whole lyrics are illogically mixed, in which ideological identities have been lost. It is important to realize that all these identity ambiguities are made intentionally, so that this behavior could be seen as a suspension of self-identities.

In the second stage, all the existing works quoted in the song are dissociated from their original contexts. For example, the intro part excerpted from *Alive* by Sa Dingding has no reference to Tibetan Buddhism and ritual functions any more as it used to in its original version. The lyrics of *Where Did You Sleep Last Night*, *God Save the Queen*, and *Fade to Black* are not relevant to Nirvana, Sex Pistols, Metallica, or the connotations of those corresponding genres of grunge, British punk, and thrash metal. The drumming techniques such as double bass and blast beating are not applied in accordance with the conventions of extreme metal. Therefore, there is evidence which suggests that all these texts have already been deconstructed into meaningless materials of sound, word, or behavior.

The process of suspension results in a subject with no identity (empty subject), while the process of deconstruction produces empty objective materials without clear meaning (empty object). In these conditions, when Yumbi made the song, they were, at the same time, making an identity reconstruction (as demonstrated in Figure 4). In such reconstruction, Yumbi weakened their two original identities as, Chinese who were inevitably impacted by Chinese traditional ideas and Chinese metal artists who were seen as followers or imitators of the West for a long time. In doing so, instead of establishing a formal subgenre presenting new Chinese identities, they in fact provided the possibility for such establishment and should be considered an exemplification of Chinese metal artists’ ambition and struggle for a unique identity in the global metal scene.

In Chinese metal discourse, the meanings of “Chinese identity” and “Chineseness” may be two sides of the same coin; while the former refers more to subjective consciousness (such as I identify my music as Chinese metal) and the latter to more objective factors (such as my music is of Chineseness). In other words, “Chinese identity” implies how the musicians are attempting to make Chinese metal, while “Chineseness” is reflected by what they have actually done in Chinese metal.

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**Figure 4.** Process of identity reconstruction in Yumbi’s creation.
metal. For long, the local metal musicians and subgenres before have been focusing on the elements employed such as traditional melodies, classic poetry, folk instruments, and so on, to produce or strengthen the sense of Chineseness. However, from a different angle, Yumbi proposes that the true identity of Chinese metal is possibly established by freeing the music from the existing boundaries and limitations of the West, exploring deeper into the ideology of China (or Chineseness), and reconsidering the relationship between them. In this case, although the band’s artistic level and musicianship could be debatable, the most significant contribution from them are motivation and ways of action for the identity struggle that the previous local metal musicians have not reached.

Although agriculture metal has declared the will of pursuing the “Chinese metal”,24 new identities cannot be truly established without a mechanism of identity-esthetic.25 Given the successful cases of death metal of Tampa (Unite States), black metal of Norway, folk metal of Finland, and so on, each of them had pushed metal forward by merging their unique identities into it. Culturally and musically, these identity elements were expressed via a kind of esthetic innovations and then resulted in new subgenres and styles. With these subgenres and styles becoming integral components of the general metal practice, the original identities were subtly and imperceptibly inscribed as well. For instance, Norwegian black metal made its legitimacy in the global metal scene by particular identity characteristics of the Nordic paganism and the unique esthetic styles such as corpse paint and un-muted tremolo picking. In this case, the identity is linked to an esthetic pursuit then successfully concreted as particular stylistic characteristics. Although Chinese metal bands have increasingly appeared on a worldwide scale since the late 2000s, its distinct identity has not yet esthetically established in the global metal scene. Perhaps, the current appeal of Chinese metal (especially Chinese folk metal) to many Western audiences is still mainly due to the heterogeneity of Chinese identity or a sort of “simplistic celebrations of geographical diversity and remoteness” (Connell & Gibson, 2004, p. 342). Indeed, there was still no evidence suggesting that Chinese metal had had great impacts on the general metal discourse such as contributing to create new styles or subgenres. However, the process of identity reconstruction can be seen as a premise of the following process of identity-esthetic.

Conclusion

In fact, agriculture metal has become less mentioned in the local metal scene with the cease of Yumbi since 2016, and it is uncertain in what direction it is going. However, if considering “establishing the identity of Chinese metal” as a holistic mission, there would always be individuals with particular contributions in different stages of the whole process. As one of them, agriculture metal presents Chineseness by its connotations of Chinese agricultural civilization identity ideologically, and breaking the musical boundaries of metal, Western pop, and Chinese pop. Moreover, it reflects Chinese metal musicians’ reaction to the long-term process of metal globalization. At the beginning, Chinese metal started with learning from and imitating the styles of the West. Then, the localization gradually deepened with increasing local elements being employed. After a period of accumulation and development, Chinese metal artists had better understandings of Western metal culture, while the level of Chinese popular music industry (in terms of both economic and artistic) also became relatively comparable to their Western contemporaries. Sooner or later, at a certain time, Chinese metal must eventually declare its own identity in the global metal scene as “Chinese metal” out of a simply “West copier.” In this sense, Yumbi and agriculture metal may not have finished Chinese metal’s identity reconstruction yet, but they definitely confirm the local metal musicians’ positive attitude to do so. More significantly, they also proposed their approach of the mechanism of identity reconstruction by recombining a suspended original identity and deconstructed texts.
China has been witnessing increasingly diverse cultures (and subcultures), especially with the Internet boom since 2000. One of the consequences is an interaction and conflict of different cultures and their relevant identities. Just as agriculture metal suddenly emerged in the early 2000s and quickly faded away in the mid-2000s, many cultural phenomena became highly unpredictable. It is difficult to assert the influence of agriculture metal about where it would lead to or what would come next. In spite of that, this research can be further discussed in two directions. Agriculture metal’s deconstruction to metal orthodox may inspire and provide local artists with more possibilities and forms to keep struggling for the “Chinese metal” in the context of cosmopolitan metal, such as Mysterain (小雨)(2018)’s integration of traditional Chinese opera, Western opera, and metal. In addition, the esthetic trend of “rustic” brought by agriculture metal is becoming a recent widespread Internet cultural phenomenon of rustic culture (mainly refers to online rustic video 土味视频), such as Kuaishou App and Douyin App. Further studies by scholars are required to respond to these new questions.

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Notes
1. Perhaps, it may be impossible to make an absolute and objective definition. For example, the Chinese (Han) civilization had much more profound influences on the whole of eastern Asia in history than China as a modern country today. Then, whether those cultural heritages kept by countries such as Japan, Korea, or Vietnam should be seen as a part of Chineseness? Moreover, the huge population of overseas Chinese may hold quite different views about what Chineseness is. However, with the continuous upgrade of China’s economic strength and international status in the recent decades, Chineseness became more often used by Western scholars to observe the stuffs relevant to the country as an object of “other.”
2. The Tang Dynasty debuted in the 1990 Modern Concert with five other local rock bands, including Brother Baby (宝贝兄弟), ADO, Cobra (眼镜蛇), 1989, Respiration (呼吸), in which the Tang Dynasty performed two songs in metal style, Everyone Hopes (每个人都希望) and Pink Mist (粉雾), which was later retitled as The Sun (太阳) and was included in their 1992 debut album.
3. It is necessary to clarify that China is a multiethnic country which consists of Han and other 55 ethnic minorities including Mongolian. In the strict sense, inner Mongolian folk metal bands present a part of Chineseness, but not equal to. As the concept of “China,” both geographically and culturally, is always broad and complex, so are Chinese identities.
4. For example, there is no result available when searching the term “agriculture metal” in English on Google, while few but informal resources are obtainable by Baidu (the most used search engine in mainland China, as the Chinese equivalent to Google).
5. Phoenix Legend is a popular music duo in mainland China, consisting of female vocalist Yangwei Linghua and male rapper Zeng Yi. Their music mixes Chinese folk tunes with rap and hip hop elements and has a wide appeal with fans all over the country. It was reported that Phoenix Legend had sold more than 6 million copies (album) in China since 2005–2012, and 10 songs from four of their albums had recorded 1 billion online hits (China Daily, 17 May 2012), see: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/entertainment/17May2012/content_15320888.htm
   Their most representative works include Above the Moon (月亮之上), Fly Freely (自由飞翔), and The Most Dazzling Folk Style (最炫民族风), see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnypvsS75Y
6. For the whole interview, see: http://www.ycwb.com/ePaper/ycwb/html/29 Oct 2012/content_1523206.htm
7. Rustic culture (Tu Wei Wen Hua) is a relatively new kind of network culture that became dramatically popular with the live broadcast video on the we-media, such as KuaiShou video. It features a few forms such as Tu Wei Shi Pin, She Hui Yao, and Han Mai. Although being embraced by a huge population, it was criticized as vulgar and boring. As a social trend, rustic culture phenomenon has been not investigated in-depth.

8. For more about Farmer Boys, see: http://www.last.fm/music/Farmer+Boys/+wiki

9. The lyrics are translated (by myself) into English as below:
   "You love fried chicken, while I love roast sweet potatoes/ You love R&B music, while I love heavy metal/ You love playing Facebook, while I love playing Chinese poker/ You have your online media, while I have heavy metal/ Who can be more rustic than agriculture metal/ Such grooves make me feel so good/ Who can be more rustic than agriculture metal/ It prevails everywhere from alleys, streets, rural areas and towns/ Who can be more rustic than agriculture metal/ Such grooves make me feel so good/ Who can be more rustic than agriculture metal/ It prevails everywhere, even the public square dancing by grannies." (你爱吃炸鸡我爱烤红薯/你听R&B我爱重金属/你爱刷微博我爱斗地主/你有你的朋友圈我有重金属/谁能比我土/这样的节奏就让我舒服/农业重金属/谁能比我土/占领大街和小巷/城乡结合部/农业重金属/谁能比我土/这样的节奏就让我舒服/农业重金属/谁能比我土/占领大街和小巷/大妈的广场舞)

10. Notably, the title of the compilation was written in Chinese phonetics rather than character. However, the pronunciation of “Shi” explicitly means “shit,” which indicated a sort of intentional poor taste and absurdity. In addition, the song titles (such as Every Time I Touch My Nipples, and Fuck with the King of All Creatures) and band names (such as Laced Papa 蕾丝爸爸 and Wild Monkey & Wild Boar 野猴子山猪) also echoed those attitudes. There were still a few bands whose names were hardly translated from Chinese into English, because they were semantically meaningless or merely consisted of profanities.

11. Available at: http://www.douban.com/group/topic/7468934/

12. Available at: http://baike.baidu.com/view/1588194.htm

13. Tungus is one of the ethnic minorities in mainland China, for more see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tungusic_peoples

14. For example, the number of followers of their official website on Douban was over 16,000 by 2015, which was almost double than many other local metal bands, see: http://site.douban.com/abayumbi/

15. According to the Internet censorship policy of mainland China, many online social media such as YouTube since March 2009 (“Internet Censorship in China,” 2010) are not available, although no official document would either confirm or deny the action. One of the results is that there are always online resources that are unavailable inside but available outside. Sometimes, for academic purposes, scholars may have to turn to the latter. For the updated-to-2018 full list of websites blocked in China, see: https://www.saporedicina.com/english/list-of-blocked-websites-in-china/

16. Sa Dingding is a well-known contemporary female world music musician and singer. Alive (Sanskrit Mantra) is one of her best hits released in 2007, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8Z8gpoF4x8

17. Tapping is a guitar-playing technique which means producing sounds by tapping the string at any fret, instead of plucking the strings. Eddie Van Halen was the person responsible for popularizing the tapping technique in metal music and later as a feature of the genre’s esthetic convention.

18. Double bass is a drumming technique which is an integral part of many genres of metal music. Artists such as Carmine Appice, Ian Paice, Cozy Powell, and Tommy Aldridge are among the double bass pioneers of metal music. Especially, the drummer of American thrash metal band Slayer, Dave Lombardo, was honored as “the godfather of double bass” by Drummer World, see: http://www.drummerworld.com/drummers/Dave_Lombardo.html

19. Blast beat is a drumming technique originated in jazz, which is now more utilized in many different subgenres of metal, especially extreme metal.
20. Illegibility is usually seen as one of the particular traits in the logo designs of most extreme metal bands, which has become an esthetic convention of the subgenre. More importantly, it should be of more profound semiotic or symbolic significance. Unfortunately, this issue has not been discussed in-depth in metal studies thus far. For a demonstration of the illegibility of black metal logos, see: http://www.nme.com/photos/31-illegible-black-metal-band-logos/289103/#photo/1

21. The video of the performance in 2014, is available at: https://www.bilibili.com/video/av8467107?from=search&seid=15066059490096713546

22. It is important to point out that the concept of “text” has been extended in popular music studies. According to Shuker’s (2008, p. 93) redefinition, the text of popular music is graphic (with an emphasis on album cover art), musical (with particular reference to issues around musicology and the analysis of song lyrics), and music video.

23. The “meaningless” here should be understood as that these materials do not possess their meanings derived from the original contexts anymore, rather than an absolute meaninglessness. Meanwhile, they will become meaningful as soon as they are rearranged and interpreted in a new context.

24. But not the only way, there are also attempts for the same task by other musicians such as Dream Spirit (梦灵)’s Han folk metal (汉民族金属), see: https://site.douban.com/mengling/

25. From a broader identity perspective, this mechanism keeps metal always being metal after different new identities constantly joint in, as long as those identities are transformed into and expressed in an esthetic way. For the same reason, this mechanism also ensures the sustainable progress and vitality of metal genre by always embracing newer subgenres and styles.

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Yuan Wang was a metal musician in China from 2002 to 2010 before devoting himself to academics. He obtained his first master’s degree in Musicology and Philosophy of Music (in 2011) from Wuhan Conservatory China, focusing on the ideas of harmony in early Western music. His second master’s in Popular Music Studies (2013) from University of Glasgow explored the symbolic significance of the vocals in extreme metal music. Then, he completed his PhD research in the same university (2017) by investigating the sociocultural meanings of Chinese metal. He is working as a teacher in Art College of Wuhan University since 2018.