

# *Aesthetic Fit and Meme Dissemination: The Revival of David Tao and the "Abstract" Culture*

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**Abstract:** In 2024, David Tao rapidly gained popularity and attention with his "abstract" online persona. This paper explores the dissemination mechanism of his "abstract" image and its alignment with the aesthetic preferences of the post-00s generation. By analyzing the secondary creations and online spread of Tao's "abstract iconic moments," such as his PowerPoint apology and improvised singing mishaps, and incorporating meme theory, the study reveals the motivations behind his image transformation. Tao's resurgence highlights the deconstruction and reconstruction of mainstream aesthetics by subcultures, offering new perspectives on public figure image rehabilitation and cross-generational cultural communication.

## **1. Introduction**

In 2024, David Tao began his Soul Power II concert tour and successively appeared on media platforms such as Bilibili's "The Most Beautiful Night", People's Entertainment Interview, and Bilibili Interview. In 2015, due to the incident of his infidelity after marriage and the public disclosure of the process in the form of a PPT, David Tao triggered heated discussions. His reputation once plummeted to the bottom and he faded out of the public eye. Since then, most of the concerts and live performances he held were small-scale. In terms of video materials, most of them were taken by fans, lacking media and official photography materials.

In 2024, a large number of video materials of David Tao's old and new concerts were spread again on the Internet. At the same time, the "abstract" related videos of David Tao also became extremely popular. The famous "abstract" scenes include "Hu Yanbin, you make me cry" when he sang "Black" with Hu Yanbin, the "ooh ah eh eh" in the music variety show, the moment when he slipped on the concert stage and said "Don't walk too fast because the ground is full of water", and the lyric "big manager" which sounded like "big lucky carp", etc. These videos were widely mocked and spread by fans and passers-by. A large number of audiences became interested in David Tao because of the funny, unexpected and amiable images created by these clips. Some audiences became new fans because of David Tao's musical talent, and a large number of old fans became active again.

Moreover, David Tao was also named one of the top 100 UP hosts on Bilibili in 2024. When searching for the official account of his team on Bilibili, it is "David Tao's Music Maternity Ward". At the same time, derivative fan-operated accounts such as "David Tao's Music Difficult Delivery

Ward", "David Tao, the God of PPT", and "David Tao's Music Old House" also emerged. On January 7, 2025, when searching for David Tao on Bilibili, under the entry of "David Tao's Music Maternity Ward", the two entries "David Tao Abstract" and "David Tao Ooh Ah" follow closely.

According to the time records sorted out by fans in the David Tao Bar, which has existed since 2005, such as the I'm OK Concert, Soul Power Concert, Just Love You Music Surprise Journey Concert, 1.2.3 We Are All Wooden Men Concert, Go to Space and Say Concert, Little Man's Rhapsody Concert, No Two No Fun Concert, Original Aspiration Concert I Love You live and Soul PowerII Concert. Since 1999, David Tao had a very low frequency of concerts between 2015 and 2016, and there were no large-scale concerts between 2017 and 2019-2023. However, in 2024, David Tao restarted the most classic Soul Power II concert tour. It can be said that this was the year when he returned to the public eye and was once again surrounded by fans. This article will analyze why David Tao established an "abstract" image in the public domain in 2024? In what ways does the widespread dissemination of his "abstract" videos resonate with the aesthetic taste of the post-00s generation? What role does the meme dissemination theory play in the process of spreading David Tao's "abstract" image?

## **2. Abstract Culture and David Tao's "Abstract" Videos**

### **2.1 The Development of "Abstract Culture"**

"Abstract culture" is a type of subculture that has become popular on the Internet in recent years, attracting the attention and participation of a large number of young netizens. Its influence is constantly expanding, and its semantics are also constantly changing. In 2014, Li Gan, who already had a fan base, live-streamed himself sleeping in the "Abstract 6324 Live Room" on the Douyu live-streaming platform and "visited" other anchors' live rooms, thus attracting a large amount of traffic. Later, he established the "Abstract Studio" and officially named the live room "Abstract", implementing 24-hour continuous live streaming. Those who did not send gifts were called "dog fans", and his audiences often spammed "abstract" related bullet comments in other live rooms, which promoted the development of "abstract culture". Eventually, Li Gan's 6324 live room was blocked due to being reported by "dog fans" after playing a cult propaganda call on speakerphone for up to 10 minutes. Therefore, the fans in "abstract culture" are often not admirers. Instead, while following, they have a sense of ridicule and mockery towards the target figures described as "abstract".

Sun Xiaochuan is a member of the "Abstract Studio". He attracted a great deal of attention in events such as the "Cai Xukun Laser Pointer Incident", the "Edison Chen Brawl Incident", and the "Sun Xiaochuan 258 Incident", further spreading the "abstract culture". In the gradual evolution process, the "abstract" in "abstract culture" is completely different from the original philosophical concept. It generally refers to those ideas and behaviors that are different from the mainstream public and deviate from the expectations of normal people. [1] As a network adjective used by fans for target public figures, "abstract" often has a sense of self-deprecation. It is a way for them to express their approval without directly attacking or abusing the target public figures.

### **2.2 David Tao's Related "Abstract" Videos and Fan Comments**

David Tao's related "abstract" videos and a large number of bullet comments with the word "abstract" are exactly one of the fans' cathartic behaviors. In July 2015, David Tao publicly admitted his infidelity after marriage. The special feature of this incident was that he made the chat records between himself and his mistress Yang Ziqing into a PPT and publicly presented them at the press conference, just like "a teacher giving a lecture". This behavior triggered heated discussions among netizens at that time, and David Tao was mocked as "the first person in history to issue a PPT to

apologize for infidelity", and "it's also very considerate to present the key points so concisely". [2] In his conclusion, the sentence "I made a wrong example, a wrong demonstration." Due to the omission and supplement in the language, netizens seized this novel point and mocked it as "made the wrong meal", and it was further derived into the meme of "right meal". Thus, the word "PPT" is closely associated with the infidelity incident and David Tao, becoming an important material for fans to tease. In the comments of David Tao's related videos in 2024, comments such as "skilled in using PPT", "made the right meal", "to escape" (lyrics from "Find Myself"), "Sorry Penny" (Penny is David Tao's wife) and the like can be seen.

In addition to the use of PPT to announce the infidelity incident, David Tao's improvised lyrics "Hu Yanbin, you make me cry" when singing "Black " with Hu Yanbin, his improvised singing of "ooh ah eh eh" in the music variety show "The Most Beautiful Harmony", and his funny selfies with a slanted bangs posted on Weibo when taking a train in his early years have all become the "famous abstract scenes" that fans love to talk about in short videos in 2024.

Therefore, "abstract" is a way for David Tao's old listeners to let go of their disappointment and abuse towards his infidelity incident. For new fans, it is a way to emphasize that their idol, while having solid musical talent, also has an approachable image different from the lofty image of other singers. [3] In an era when celebrities no longer share their daily lives on Weibo and instead buy hot searches everywhere to market their personas, David Tao's "scandals" are actually a proof of his authenticity. The fans of David Tao in their 20s in the 2000s have passed their prime of life in 2024. Perhaps they have forgiven this once-disappointing music idol of a generation based on their own life experiences. At the same time, a new group of post-00s fans have entered their youth. They have discovered that David Tao's musical works are still at a textbook level in the current Chinese music industry. And his perhaps embarrassing, awkward and uncomfortable past has instead become a special and attractive feature of this "pioneer of Chinese R&B". Using this as a starting point, people have started to pay attention to his exquisite music again and have supported his comeback.

### 3. David Tao's "Abstract" Videos and the Aesthetic Logic of Post-00s Users

The author designed a questionnaire related to David Tao and finally received 429 responses. Among the relevant data, about 87% of the valid respondents think that David Tao is "abstract", and about 98% of them are post-00s, and most of them are still students (students at school). For post-00s audiences, David Tao is no longer the "Godfather of Chinese R&B". As the "God of Abstract PPT", he is still widely concerned. What is the aesthetic logic behind this?

In terms of David Tao's musical style, R&B (Rhythm and Blues) is a very free musical style that emphasizes improvisation, thus giving singers a great space to showcase their individuality. When R&B singers perform, they will add elements of their own feelings, such as vibrato or changing the rhythm, to give unique interpretations. When listening to the live version, you will find that for the same song sung by the same singer, each performance is not exactly the same, and the singer will add feelings specific to that time and place. Such changes are closely related to the singer's improvisational ability. And improvisational ability is a manifestation of creative thinking, which is a comprehensive accumulation of human unconsciousness and subconsciousness. [4] Many of David Tao's "famous abstract scenes" are precisely cases where he chose an unusual way in his improvisational expression, or it can be called a "fiasco" scene. However, the exquisite arrangement and musical aesthetics of David Tao's works are still being learned by countless younger generations in the Chinese music industry in 2024, and few people can surpass him. These "fiasco" scenes actually add charm to David Tao's "real" and "funny" image, forming a contrast with his serious and earnest attitude towards music.

In addition, the post-00s generation has the aesthetic characteristics of pursuing individuality,

being practical, having extremely open minds, and pursuing niche cultural circles. [5] This also conforms to David Tao's personal characteristics. First of all, David Tao was born in Hong Kong, China, with his ancestral home in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province. He spent his childhood in Taipei, Taiwan Province, China. At the age of 15, he went to the United States to study and majored in psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) for his undergraduate degree. He has a multicultural background. He combines R&B music, hip-hop music and other styles with traditional Chinese music, and re-orchestrates and releases new versions of folk songs with a unique Western arrangement style, such as "Looking at the Spring Breeze" and "Susan Says". The inspiration for David Tao's "Susan Says" comes from the traditional Chinese opera "Su San Rescued from Prison". [6] He transplanted the story that took place in Hongtong County, Shanxi Province in the Ming Dynasty into a love story between Taipei and Nanjing in modern times, and made a new adaptation and narration with modern thinking and expressions. With his unique understanding and changes, he has given new vitality to these folk songs and old songs. Therefore, David Tao's multicultural background and musical ability are in line with the practical and open-minded aesthetic characteristics of the post-00s generation. And R&B music, which has a higher singing difficulty compared to pop music, also meets the psychological needs of some post-00s who pursue niche cultural circles. In conclusion, besides the influence of his private life events on his reputation, the musical value and aesthetic value that David Tao brings to the audience are stable and long-term. This still attracted a group of young post-00s audiences in 2024 who are open-minded, love high-quality music, and evaluate public figures' private lives and works separately.

#### **4. Meme Dissemination in David Tao's "Abstract" Videos**

##### **4.1 Meme Dissemination and Abstract Culture**

In 1976, the British behavioral ecologist Dawkins abbreviated the Greek root "Mimeme" to "Meme". Its core idea is that memes self-replicate through imitation. In order to achieve self-replication and further dissemination, its replication characteristics should have three obvious features: longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity. That is, whether the meme has a long survival time, whether it is easy to be replicated, and whether its semantics are easy to be changed.

Abstract culture itself has the attributes of fidelity, easy replication, and long survival time. Its fidelity lies in the fact that the characteristic of abstract culture itself is that certain behaviors are different from common sense and are worthy of ridicule or self-deprecation. Therefore, this type of culture emphasizes individuality, has strong pertinence, and is not easy to change in meaning and form. It often includes specific personal behaviors or certain specific languages. From the perspective of easy replication, taking Li Gan's live-streaming of himself sleeping, which was wildly imitated by the public, and David Tao's self-evaluation of his outfit as "like a green vomiting leopard" as examples, the points where abstract cultural phenomena are easily replicated and spread often lie in their being easy to understand or unexpected, so they are easy to remember. The continuous development and evolution of abstract culture or the increasingly widespread use of "abstract" as a common Internet term are inseparable from the audience's curiosity and the psychology of seeking novelty, the development of media empowerment, and the intentions and behaviors of public figures to attract traffic by creating various maverick "memory points".

##### **4.2 Meme Dissemination and David Tao's "Abstract" Videos**

The dissemination of David Tao's "abstract" videos also fully possesses these three elements. From the perspective of fidelity, the languages used in the "abstract" videos made by his fans, such as "abstract", "PPT", "ooh ah eh eh", "Hu Yanbin, you make me cry", due to their strong pertinence, are

difficult to change in meaning and form during the dissemination process. Instead, they will arouse the curiosity of uninformed passers-by, become symbols for fans to identify each other, strengthen the sense of identity within the fan group, and even attract outsiders to join psychologically. For example, Huang Xuan, a singer who gained popularity by participating in the show "Singer" in 2024, is a loyal fan of David Tao. He has mentioned David Tao many times in his personal concerts, and his own image as a "bald head", fashionable dresser, and lively person echoes with David Tao's "abstract" and unusual impression. This will consolidate the old fans within the same music culture circle and drive new fans to join David Tao's fan group.

From the perspective of the replication rate, the words used by fans are very simple and are words commonly used in people's daily life and work, with a wide range of applications, so they are conducive to dissemination. Tang Meiying divided Internet language into ten types: symbol graphics, homophonic substitution, word abbreviation, semantic change, foreign words, character splitting, reduplication, garbled code, styling language, and interjections. "To escape" and "Sorry Penny" conform to semantic changes, and "ooh ah eh eh" conforms to interjections and reduplication, and it is also easy to remember in terms of styling. There are countless other examples. Therefore, overall, the word memes presented in David Tao's "abstract" videos have a certain degree of practicality and fashionability, are easy to remember and spread, and their language structure, content, and information are all easy to be replicated, having a certain vitality. As well-established memes, whether they can continue to spread and develop into powerful memes, and their survival time, depend on whether David Tao can maintain his popularity relying on his comprehensive strength and whether fans can always have materials for continuous creation and re-creation.

## 5. Conclusion

David Tao's 2024 resurgence exemplifies meme-driven fandom. His "abstract" persona—a blend of musical mastery and unscripted humanity—resonates with Gen-Z's demand for authenticity. By divorcing art from artist, fans have rewritten his narrative, proving that in the digital age, even scandals can be remixed into redemption.

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