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The Song Readers:
Rap Music and the Politics of Storytelling in Taiwan

A dissertation presented

by

Meredith Lynne Schweig

to

The Department of Music

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of Music

Harvard University

Cambridge, Massachusetts

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The Song Readers:
Rap Music and the Politics of Storytelling in Taiwan

Abstract

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of Taiwan's hip-hop scene and an examination of rap music's emergence as a trenchant form of musical narrative discourse in the post-martial law era (1987 to the present). Its central argument is that performers have invoked rap as a storytelling practice to make sound and sense of the dramatic social and political transformations that transpired in the wake of Taiwan's democratization at the dusk of the twentieth century, and in the years thereafter. My discussion draws on a vibrant archive of materials collected over eighteen months of fieldwork and proceeds from two primary assumptions: first, that Taiwan rap is a narrative genre, with antecedents in an array of Afro-diasporic oral narrative traditions as well as local narrative traditions that employ speech-song techniques; and second, that storytelling can be understood as a process of collaborative social and political engagement that empowers artists and audiences to a sense of agency in the world they see around them.

The document is divided into three main parts, the first of which approaches the history of rap in Taiwan as itself a narrative construction, subject to revision and reinterpretation at the hands of multiple authors. In this spirit, it unfolds not one but three distinct histories, each anchored by a different term used locally to designate "rap." The second part of the dissertation examines the people and places that collectively comprise the Taiwan rap community, with a dual focus on demographic representation vis-à-vis the

interlocking categories of ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, and the emplaced qualities of the music vis-à-vis its emergence from specific localities, places of learning, and places of production. The third and final part foregrounds rap's specificity as a narrative genre to examine more closely the music's poetics and politics. It considers the stories rappers tell and the means by which they tell them, in the process exploring works that reflect or construct larger narratives about Taiwan as a nation, as well as those that engage smaller, more specifically contextual narratives about relationships, family, school, and work.

Contents

Acknowledgements vi
Notes on Romanization and Translation x
List of Figures and Musical Examples xii
Introduction: Of Stories and Storytellers 1
A Tale of Taiwan 9
A Tale From the Field 23
Adjacent Scholarly Narratives 37
Structure of the Dissertation and Overview of Contents 43
Part One: The Beginning(s) of Rhyme: Constructing Rap's Multiple Pasts 47
Unfolding the History of *Xiha* 50
Unfolding the History of *Raoshe* 83
Unfolding the History of *Liām-Kua* 100
Part Two: Exploring Rap's Interpretive Community 124
People: They Who Share a Narrated World 128
Places: The Locations That Gather Community in Their Midst 179
Part Three: The Politics of Storytelling in Taiwan 238
The Means by Which Rap Stories Are Told: Musical Sound and Language 243
The Stories Taiwan's Rappers Tell 294
Postscript: The Story Goes On 347
Appendix A: Core Interview Questions 351
References 352

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know what I did to deserve you, but I am so very glad to have you in my life. And last but certainly not least, I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Andres: Thank you for being a part of my life's story. I can't wait to write the next chapter with you, Eleanor, and beautiful baby June.

Notes on Romanization and Translation

This dissertation includes terms in Mandarin and Hoklo languages. In the body text, Mandarin terms are indicated with parentheses ( ) and Hoklo terms with square brackets [ ]. One Hakka-language term—the dialect name "Hoiluk"—appears in braces { }. For Mandarin terms, titles, and names, I provide common English spelling or translation, followed by romanization and Han characters in parentheses. For Hoklo terms, titles, and names, I provide common English spelling or translation, followed by romanization and Han characters in brackets. I romanize Mandarin according to the Pinyin system and Hoklo according to the Pe̍h-ōe-jī system, except in cases where the term, title, or name in question is widely known by an alternative spelling (e.g. "Chiang Kai-shek" rather than "Jiang Jieshi," "Taipei" rather than "Taibei"). In general, I romanize terms, titles, and names according to their Mandarin iterations, except in cases where the entity in question is known primarily according to its Hoklo iteration. For authors with Sinitic names writing in English, I provide only their preferred personal name spelling and no Han characters. In some cases, I provide English names and titles in either the body text or footnotes that do not translate, strictly speaking, the original Mandarin or Hoklo. This occurs when a performer or author has provided his or her own English name or title and is intended to assist English-speaking readers who wish to locate the source material in question.

Translations of song lyrics do not attempt to preserve the rhythm or rhyme of the original texts but are intended to provide a sense of general meaning, tone, and emphasis. In most cases, Mandarin and Hoklo lyrics are formatted according to the way they appear in album liner notes or on widely read or artist-authored Internet sites. As in traditional

Chinese written poetry, rap lyrics are rarely transcribed with punctuation marks—question words indicate questions; small gaps in the text appear in place of commas, colons, and periods; and diction, rather than exclamation points, communicates emphasis. I therefore intervene minimally in my English translations, providing punctuation only where it is absolutely necessary for comprehension.

List of Figures and Musical Examples

Figures

Figure 1: Brotherhood performing at the “921.87 Benefit Concert,” 27 September 2009. Photo courtesy of Kung Fu Entertainment..... 29

Figure 2: Fan Chiang performing in Tainan, 27 September 2009. Photo courtesy of Kung Fu Entertainment..... 144

Figure 3: A predominantly male audience at a performance in Tainan, 27 September 2009. Photo by author. 149

Figure 4: Audience members at an MC Hotdog show recording the performance on their data phones, 21 May 2011. Photo by author..... 162

Figure 5: Participants filming a scene for Dog G's "Change Taiwan" (*Gaibian Taiwan* 改變台灣) video, from the five special municipalities, 17 October 2010. Photo by author. 185

Figure 6: Members of the NTU Hip-Hop Culture Research Society gather around for a lesson in the basic tenets of DJing, 29 October 2010. Photo by author..... 203

Figure 7: H.O.O.D. spokesperson introducing Chang Jui-chuan at his lecture on the Soochow University campus, 17 April 2010. Photo by author..... 207

Figure 8: Art hung on the wall at Kung Fu Entertainment, an illustration of Dog G wearing a t-shirt that reads "HIP HOP AIN'T DEAD IT'S LIVE IN TAINAN." The text on the right translates as "Light of Taiwan" (*Taiwan zhiguang* 台灣之光). 26 September 2010. Photo by author. 210

Figure 9: Dog G at the Kung Fu Entertainment headquarters in Tainan, 26 September 2010. Photo by author. 211

Figure 10: Screen capture of posting on PTT Hip-Hop Board announcing the author’s talk at the Academia Sinica, posted 13 May 2010..... 220

Figure 11: Shortee at his home studio working with Ill Mo, who is visible on the small monitor to the right, 30 April 2010. Photo by the author 227

Figure 12: Mr. Brown in his home studio, 27 August 2010. Photo by author..... 229

Figure 13: The Rhymewave display case in Ximending, 8 March 2010. Photos by author. 234

Figure 14: Candles arranged in the shape of Taiwan at the "921.87 Benefit Concert," 27 September 2009. Photo by author..... 237

Figure 15: Chang Jui-chuan performs live with a violinist, 4 June 2011. Photo by author. 274

Musical Examples

Musical Example 1: Transcription of excerpt from Kou Chou Ching's "Good Appetite" [好嘴斗], approx. 1:20-1:40 118

Musical Example 2: Transcription of vocal line from Blacklist Workshop's "Taxi" (計程車), approximately 0:53 - 1:07 252

Musical Example 3: Transcription of vocal line from Soft Lipa's "Homesickness" (鄉愁), approx. 0:29 - 0:40 255

Musical Example 4: Transcription of main vocal line from Dog G's "Forty-four Fours" (四十四個四), approximately 0:15 - 0:35 258

Musical Example 5: Transcription of the “oriental riff.” 320

Introduction

Of Stories and Storytellers

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of Taiwan's hip-hop scene and an examination of rap music's emergence as a trenchant form of musical narrative discourse in the post-martial law era (1987 to the present). I argue that performers have invoked rap as a storytelling practice to make sound and sense of the dramatic social and political transformations that transpired in the wake of Taiwan's democratization at the dusk of the twentieth century, and in the years thereafter. My discussion proceeds from two primary assumptions: first, that Taiwan rap is a narrative genre, with antecedents in an array of Afro-diasporic oral narrative traditions as well as local narrative traditions that employ speech-song techniques; and second, that storytelling can be understood as a process of collaborative social and political engagement that empowers artists and audiences to a sense of agency in the world they see around them. Proportionate to the complexity of the island's history and intractable nature of the debates regarding its cultural and political identity, many competing voices have emerged over the last quarter-century in various spheres of discourse—artistic, academic, governmental—that each attempt to define what Taiwan was, is, and will be. This project treats rap as a wellspring of such voices and examines how the narrative ethos of the genre is integral to its participation in the larger project of telling stories about Taiwan.

Musicians on the island first began experimenting with rap music at the end of the 1980s, just as nearly four decades of martial law under the Kuomintang (*Guomindang* 國

民黨), or KMT, were drawing to a close.[1] A number of momentous sociopolitical changes took place in the ensuing years, including the legalization of opposition political parties, end of official government censorship, and formal recognition of multiculturalism. Of greatest relevance to artists on the island was the gradual dismantling of long-standing policies that had restricted local cultural and linguistic practices for the sake of promoting KMT claims to political legitimacy. The more liberal environment galvanized musicians in the immediate post-martial law period to engage political themes in their work; to write lyrics in long-suppressed Hoklo, Hakka, and Aboriginal languages; and to rehabilitate and re-imagine local musical forms. Blacklist Workshop (*Heimingdan gongzuoshi* 黑名單工作室), an artists' collective that coalesced in Taipei during the 1980s, pioneered a new sound with their 1989 debut *Songs of Madness* (*Zhuakuang ge* 抓狂歌). The album merged rap with new wave and traditional Taiwanese musical styles in compositions that gave voice to lower-middle class protestations against social injustice, political repression, and economic inequality.[2] Although banned by authorities for its incendiary lyrics during the last days of official censorship, *Songs of Madness* sold tens of thousands of copies via underground channels and is today widely considered a watershed in the history of popular music on the island. The sounds and messages of

[1] The KMT is also known as the Nationalist Party or the Chinese Nationalist Party. Founded by Song Jiaoren (宋教仁) and Sun Yat-sen (*Sun Yixian* 孫逸仙), and guided by Sun's "Three Principles of the People," the KMT emerged in China following the 1911 Revolution. Under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek (*Jiang Jieshi* 蔣介石), the Party ruled most of China beginning in 1928 until it lost the Chinese Civil War to Communist forces in 1949. At that time, the KMT retreated to Taiwan, where it presided over the Republic of China as a one-party state until the late 1980s.

[2] Blacklist Workshop 黑名單工作室, *Zhuakuang ge* 抓狂歌 [Songs of madness], Rock Records, 1989, compact disc.

Taiwan rap diversified throughout the 1990s and 2000s as a bona fide hip-hop scene took root, but many performers—even those whose works were destined primarily for play at parties or in dance club environments—have maintained a clear interest in the project of representing social reality, often realized in terms of the hip-hop imperative to "keep it real."

Taken together, the many stories that Taiwan rap artists tell produce a mosaic effect, not unlike a photo collage comprising numerous small images that in combination create a larger picture. As in a photo collage, the constituent images may be heterogeneous in style and content—indeed, on individual examination it might seem unbelievable that they could possibly bear any relationship to one another—but when assembled and viewed as a totality, they form a remarkably stable gestalt. To this point, Taiwan rap narratives explore a wide array of subjects, from the struggles and joys associated with the vicissitudes of everyday life to more topical social and political matters. Artists are equally eclectic in their approaches to musical accompaniment, with some sampling from recordings of traditional musics, others interpolating sounds from American R&B and soul, and yet others lifting beats wholesale from globally ubiquitous hip-hop superstars. And yet, as I aim to demonstrate through extensive discussion of the music's history on the island and demographic representation in the scene, as well as analysis of selected songs, the corpus of Taiwan rap does indeed contribute to the formation of a coherent and compelling sonic portrait of life in Taiwan at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries.

This portrait owes its coherence in part to the relative demographic homogeneity of participants in the rap scene, who write from their vantage points as predominantly

young, urban, middle-class males. They are generally between the ages of 20 and 35 and were born or now reside in Taiwan's major metropolitan areas: Taipei, Taizhong, Gaoxiong, and Tainan. Many of them hail from comfortable socioeconomic backgrounds and have earned advanced academic degrees, and most hold one or several jobs to supplement whatever meager (or non-existent) earnings they garner from their activities as musicians. Their works frequently comment on the challenges of being young men in Taiwan and assuming an adult masculine role in a rapidly transforming political and socioeconomic environment. In a time and place where a stagnating economy has made it difficult for them to attain adult status by traditional means—which necessitate establishing and supporting one's own family—they ask what it means to successfully navigate the passage from boyhood to manhood. Now guaranteed the right to participate in political processes, they experiment with openly challenging older men who stand in positions of authority. Occasionally indulging hedonistic impulses, they also extoll the pleasures inherent in being young men on the island today, lyrically and musically marking out the various freedoms and luxuries they enjoy and describing their experiences carousing with one another and with members of the opposite sex. Invocations of the third-person narrative voice in Taiwan rap are rare—performers employ the first-person voice almost exclusively, giving the impression that they are performing in an autobiographical capacity, or at least with reference to their own personal experiences of being-in-the-world.[3]

[3] Of course, fictive first-person narrators are possible, but hip-hop scholar Tricia Rose has written of rap lyrics as "closely linked with the author" and "the voice of the composer and performer." Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 87.

It is important to acknowledge that rap is what ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin might term a "micromusic" within Taiwan's dominant musical "superculture," as the scene is a relatively small one—both in terms of audience size and number of recordings produced—in the ecology of popular music on the island.[4] Mandopop, the bread and butter of the mainstream music industry, boasts by far the largest number of fans, and there is also a significant audience for locally produced rock and folk musics. At the outset of my fieldwork, friends, colleagues, and even performers often responded with bewilderment when I expressed interest in Taiwan rap, as they simply could not fathom how a scene that seemed so small and ultimately marginal could possibly be the source of any interest or insight. And yet it is precisely the intimacy of the rap community and its marginality with respect to the commercial music industry that creates space for Taiwan's rappers to tell the kinds of stories they want to tell and endows them collectively with the potential to bring about progressive change where they desire it. To this point, the vast majority of performers I interviewed for this project are not signed to labels. They often lamented the lack of industry support for rap music but at the same time acknowledged that the independence they enjoy from commercial interests is part and parcel of delivering on the promise to "keep it real."

In exploring the imperative to "keep it real," hip-hop scholar Imani Perry underlines the centrality of community in hip-hop discourses of authenticity, citing the Real as "the location where an individual remains committed to his or her community, professes that allegiance, and remains honestly and organically rooted in his or her

[4] Mark Slobin *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1993).

position in the world."[5] The community to which Perry specifically refers is not merely the heterogeneous conglomeration of people devoted to making or listening to rap, but the broader community of urban, mostly African American youth from which they emerge. The Real in hip-hop storytelling, per Perry's understanding, materializes from efforts to honest representation on behalf of these individuals, who may otherwise lack the power to represent themselves. The question of what it means to be "real" (*zhenshide* 真實的) in the Taiwan context is something I approach through discussion of rap community rituals and performance practices, and by reference to that which community discourse posits as honest and truthful. Invoking a hip-hop ethos of resistance,[6] Taiwan's rappers display a marked cynicism towards authority figures, exemplified by representatives of the government (e.g. the president, police, assorted bureaucrats), educational system (e.g. teachers), and mainstream music industry, and to a lesser extent by parents and other senior family members. Keeping it real necessitates identifying and performing opposition to unequal power relations wherever they are presumed to lie, whether in the past, present, or future.

The strongly hierarchical nature of Taiwan's Confucian society, coupled with an extensive history of hegemonic rule under successive colonial administrations, creates a milieu in which opportunities to struggle against domination by others—at least

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[5] Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 88.

[6] Although there are numerous subgenres of rap and not all engage social or political issues, scholars and fans of hip-hop have long identified the music with an ethos of resistance. For a discussion of resistant messages in American rap through the mid-1990s, see Theresa A. Martinez, "Popular Culture as Oppositional Culture: Rap as Resistance," *Sociological Perspectives* 40, no. 2 (1997): 265-286.

discursively—are abundant. For rappers, a major component of this struggle is the imperative to counter official narratives (and metanarratives) authored by those in positions of power, which they perceive as having historically obscured and overwhelmed alternative stories and accounts of individual experience. In suggesting that the stories Taiwan's rappers tell in turn tell a larger story about Taiwan, I acknowledge that this larger story cannot reflect in any truly comprehensive way the perspectives of the island's diverse population. With a few notable exceptions, rappers do not attempt to represent social reality for women, the poor, the middle-aged and elderly, or those from rural areas. These groups are not present in significant numbers as artists or audience members in the scene, and performers do not often endeavor or presume to tell stories on their behalf.

That said, it is not the goal of this project to evaluate whether the "real" of Taiwan rap is empirically honest or truthful. In *Representing Atrocity in Taiwan: The 2/28 Incident and White Terror in Fiction and Film*, literature scholar Sylvia Li-Chun Lin confronts the challenges of writing about historical trauma on the island, commenting on the ways in which renditions of memories are inflected by their authors' political ideologies and desires for "narratorial expediency."[7] In her analyses of stories about the past, she notes the importance of recognizing that "memory is never innocent; how and what one remembers is inevitably colored by one's perspective or politics, especially when dealing with atrocity," and that "prior knowledge of the outcome may overtake the narrative."[8] Similarly, the stories that Taiwan's rappers tell—about the past or present—

[7] Sylvia Li-chun Lin, *Representing Atrocity in Taiwan: The 2/28 Incident and White Terror in Fiction and Film* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), 35-36.

[8] Ibid., 7-8.

cannot reflexively be considered objectively true; the "real" of Taiwan rap is not necessarily empirical reality, and when we speak of "keeping it real" it is always with an awareness of the "honest" and "truthful" as historically contingent and personally subjective. Nevertheless, through an examination of the ways in which the community constructs "the real," I aim to offer insight into the impulses that motivate rappers in their craft. My objective is not to evaluate the validity of the truths proffered in performance. It is, rather, to impart a sense of the importance of exercising personal and community agency in advocating for particular imaginings of the true, the honest, the real.

In addition to the politics of Taiwan rap storytelling, this project is also about poetics. Lyrical rather than musical elements have often been explored as primary sites of meaning in rap, but I listen to the works of the island's artists with an ear to the inextricability of the sonic and literary. I argue that meaning resides not just in the content of rap stories but also in the sonic and performative structures that govern their telling. This includes consideration of the character of vocal performance, especially approaches to rhythm and rhyme, referred to in hip-hop-nation parlance as "flow." It extends to matters of language, as the rap community considers the ability to make musical the melodic contours of Taiwan's various tonal languages a key measure of a performer's artistry. I also examine aspects of accompaniment to the voice, including the use of samples, original instrumentals, and environmental sonorities. Through this, I aim to elucidate what it is about Taiwan rap as a musical practice that draws artists to performance, even with the prior knowledge that becoming a rapper is unlikely to lead to increased financial or social capital. Moreover, I seek to impart understanding of how

sound produces the affective dimensions of rap stories, imbuing words with power they would not otherwise have if left to sit silently on the page or simply articulated as speech.

In the remainder of this introduction, I begin with a brief overview of pertinent aspects of Taiwan's demographic makeup and history, with particular emphasis on the events that transpired in the years following the Second World War and end of martial law. I then provide an account of my experience of fieldwork and the methodologies employed in the research and writing of this project. Next, I examine the notion of the "politics of storytelling" and provide both an overview of key theoretical concepts and discussion of relevant scholarly literature. Finally, I conclude with a more detailed overview of the three main sections of the dissertation and their constituent parts.

A Tale of Taiwan

Located approximately 100 miles off the southeastern coast of China, Taiwan is a small, sweet potato-shaped landmass, about 245 miles long and 90 miles wide.[9] The majority of its population of 23 million people is crowded onto the flat plains of the western third of the island, while the mountainous eastern two-thirds are more sparsely populated. Positioned on the outskirts of the Pacific Ring of Fire and bisected by the Tropic of Cancer, it is subtropical in the north and tropical in the south. The whole of the island is hot and humid for much of the year and experiences frequent seismic events, as well as heavy rains and typhoons between the late summer and autumn months.

Taiwan's indigenous Austronesian language-speaking peoples—also known as

[9] The territory referred to as "Taiwan" also includes several smaller offshore islands (the Penghu chain, Orchid Island, Green Island, and Lamay).

"original inhabitants" (*yuanzhumin* 原住民) or Aborigines[10]—began settling in villages along the island's alluvial plains and throughout the central mountain range approximately 8,500 years ago.[11] In the first half of the seventeenth century, at least fourteen distinct groups inhabited the western and northern coastal areas, and an additional nine groups resided in the Central Mountain Range and along the southeastern coast,[12] all living in "independent villages that varied in size from a few thousand to less than a hundred."[13] The indigenous peoples spoke approximately twenty-four unique languages and kept discrete cultural traditions,[14] although they also practiced intermarriage and inter-settlement trade.[15] They were the majority population on the island until Han migrants from China began to overtake them in number during the latter

[10] I use the term "Aborigine," with a capitalized initial, following the same logic as anthropologist Melissa Brown. She writes: "'Aborigine' is the preferred English appellation of the Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines. *Yuanzhumin* (original inhabitants) is their preferred appellation in Mandarin Chinese. These English and Chinese terms do not carry a pejorative meaning in Taiwan. I capitalize 'Aborigine' to indicate the equivalence between this term and 'Han' as ethnic designations." Melissa Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese?: The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 251n2.

[11] See Robert Blust, "Subgrouping, Circularity and Extinction: Some Issues in Austronesian Comparative Linguistics," in *Selected Papers from the Eighth International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics*, ed. E. Zeitoun and P.J.K. Li (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1999), 31-94.

[12] Ronald G. Knapp, "The Shaping of Taiwan's Landscapes," in *Taiwan: A New History*, ed. Murray A. Rubinstein (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 11.

[13] Emma Jinhua Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 104.

[14] Elizabeth Zeitoun, Ching-hua Yu, and Cui-xia Weng, "The Formosan Language Archive: Development of a Multimedia Tool to Salvage the Languages and Traditions of the Indigenous Tribes of Taiwan," *Oceanic Linguistics* 42, no. 1 (June 2003): 218. At least nine of these languages are now extinct.

[15] Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined*, 104.

half of the seventeenth century.[16] The majority of these came from Fujian or Guangdong provinces; census surveys from the early twentieth century suggest that 82 percent of this group were ethnic Hoklo peoples and 16 percent were Hakka.[17] Although they shared some cultural practices and maintained similar patterns of social organization, the Hoklo and Hakka, who frequently became embroiled in feuds, spoke mutually unintelligible languages. They also differed in musical traditions, dress, architecture, and cuisine, as well as in regard to festivals, temple names, and deities; additionally, the Hakka did not bind feet as the Hoklo did.[18] Within the Hoklo group there was further subdivision among those with origins in China's Zhangzhou and Quanzhou prefectures, who spoke mutually intelligible but distinct dialects and worshipped different deities.[19]

Over the last four hundred years, Taiwan has been governed by a succession of different colonial powers. Between 1624 and 1662, Dutch forces controlled the island and battled for dominance with the Spanish, who occupied settlements in the north from 1626 to 1642. The Dutch were eventually driven out by Koxinga (*Zheng Chenggong* 鄭成功), a Ming loyalist and military commander who sought to establish Taiwan as a base of resistance against the Manchu-controlled Qing dynasty. In 1683, Zheng's forces were at last defeated by the Qing, and Taiwan was made a prefecture of Fujian Province. The island maintained this status until 1885, when it was promoted to full province following

[16] Knapp, "Shaping," 9-10.

[17] Harry J. Lamley, "Subethnic Rivalry in the Ch'ing Period," in *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society*, ed. Emily Martin Ahern and Hill Gates (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1981), 291.

[18] Ibid., 284.

[19] Ibid., 293.

invasions by the British during the Opium War and the French during the Sino-French War. Taiwan's provincial standing was fairly short-lived, however: following the defeat of the Qing in the First Sino-Japanese War, it was ceded as a condition of the Treaty of Shimonoseki and became a dependency of the Empire of Japan from 1895 to 1945, when Japan was overtaken by Chinese forces following the end of the Second World War. At this point, the island fell under the control of the KMT, at that time embroiled in a protracted civil war against Communist forces on the Chinese mainland.

Incoming KMT governors faced immediate challenges in administering the island, which had been institutionally and infrastructurally transformed under Japanese rule. The Japanese envisioned Taiwan as an economic and cultural extension of the homeland; as such, they invested tremendous sums of money in infrastructure and industry, attempted to institute compulsory education, and established a functioning criminal justice system that was relatively free of corruption.[20] Moreover, they enacted a policy of *doka* (同化), or "assimilation," which formalized the effort to "Japanize" the various peoples on the island and govern them according to the same laws and principles as in Japan. As the Empire mobilized for war in 1937, Japan unveiled a second campaign called *kominka* (皇民化), or "imperialization," which aimed to reshape the colonized population into genuine subjects of the Emperor through a variety of means, including the imposition of the Japanese language and Shinto religion, conversion of family names, elimination of ancestral temples and shrines, and suppression of local cultural practices

[20] Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese,* 54-55.

like ritual opera and puppet theater.[21] By the time the Japanese departed Taiwan at the end of the Second World War, the island and its peoples had been fundamentally transformed across multiple domains of life.

Beyond its lingering affinities with Japan, the populace that the KMT encountered was, as previously noted, ethnically diverse, a mixture of Aboriginal, Hoklo, and Hakka peoples. Although by most accounts this community welcomed the departure of Japanese colonial authorities and arrival of the KMT, feelings of goodwill rapidly dissipated in the wake of rampant government and military corruption, massive inflation, and widespread unemployment. In particular, "government domination of the economy through monopolies and state-run firms was a disaster" as it put local peoples at a severe competitive disadvantage.[22] Tensions erupted between KMT authorities and their new subjects in 1947 with the notorious 2-28 Incident (*er-er-ba shijian* 二二八事件). In brief, the Incident was set off on February 27, 1947 when agents of the government, which held a monopoly on sales of tobacco and alcohol, attempted to confiscate black-market cigarettes from a middle-aged widow named Lin Chiang-mai (*Lin Jiangmai* 林江邁), who was peddling her wares in a Taipei park. When she resisted, an agent hit her in the head with a pistol, setting off a confrontation with a crowd of bystanders that ultimately led to the death of a civilian. Word of these events spread quickly, and by the next morning—February 28, hence the name "2-28 Incident"—thousands had taken to the streets to protest. Pent-up anger towards the KMT's economic policies and rampant

[21] Leo T.S. Ching, *Becoming "Japanese": Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 92.

[22] Dafydd Fell, *Government and Politics in Taiwan* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 13.

corruption exploded, and bloody confrontation between authorities and civilians ensued. The conflict spread throughout the island, prompting a violent government crackdown that ultimately claimed the lives of at least ten thousand civilians.[23] The 2-28 Incident, which led to the first imposition of martial law on the island and made plain the KMT's willingness to employ draconian methods of social control, remains a flashpoint in Taiwan's political discourse to this day.

Following defeat by the Communists in 1949, Chiang Kai-shek and approximately 1.5 million refugees decamped to Taiwan to establish a new base for the Republic of China (ROC), a measure initially conceived merely as a stopgap until Nationalist forces could recapture the mainland. In an effort to quell possible pro-Communist and pro-independence activities, the Governor of the Taiwan Provincial Government, Chen Cheng (陳誠), again declared martial law on the island. This initiative gave virtually unlimited authority to Chiang and the military, critical to the process of consolidating the KMT's power and disciplining an increasingly discontented population in turmoil. Martial law prohibited the formation of opposition political parties and endowed the KMT with absolute control of mass media. The decades following the imposition of martial law, known today as the White Terror (*baise kongbu* 白色恐怖), also saw severe restrictions on civil and political rights: Taiwan's peoples enjoyed neither freedom of speech nor freedom of assembly, and thousands were tried in military courts, jailed, and executed under suspicion of dissident activity.

[23] Estimates of the number of civilian deaths following the 2-28 Incident are wide-ranging. Political scientist Dafydd Fell estimates approximately 10,000, while literary scholar Sylvia Li-Chun Lin opines that the exact number will never be determined because of government suppression of information about the event. See Fell, *Government and Politics*, 13, and Lin, *Representing Atrocity*, 3.

Under the rule of the KMT, Taiwan's Hoklo and Hakka inhabitants assumed a new collective identity as "Native Taiwanese," or *benshengren* (本省人, lit. "people from within the province"), that opposed the collective identity of the "Mainlanders," or *waishengren* (外省人, lit. "people from outside the province"). The term *bensheng* concealed much of the ethnolinguistic variation within the pre-war Han group and further obscured the identities of Aborigines who had previously been absorbed into the Hoklo through marriage, assimilation, and other forms of identity change.[24] Likewise, the *waisheng* appellation suggested some degree of homogeneity among the heterogeneous Mainlander population, which had origins in multiple regions of China. Throughout the period of martial law, the KMT regime's repressive and discriminatory policies fostered a sense of animosity between these two groups, even as it attempted to enforce on the island's peoples a uniform and coherent "Chinese" identity—itself an imaginary construction subordinated to a political purpose.

The KMT's claims to sovereignty over China while in exile on Taiwan necessitated an array of campaigns aimed at fostering a sense of common history and culture on both sides of the Strait. Advancement of Mandarin as the "national language" (*guoyu* 國語) was integral to this objective, leading to the immediate proscription of Japanese and the systematic elimination of Hoklo, Hakka, and Aboriginal languages from public life. Beginning in the 1960s, the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement (*Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong* 中華文化復興運動) strenuously promoted modalities of artistic expression thought to embody Confucian values and the spirit of "traditional" China,

[24] See Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese*, for a complete discussion of the process by which groups of plains Aborigines gradually assumed Hoklo identities.

especially Peking opera (referred to as "national opera" *guoju* 國劇), Chinese painting ("national painting" *guohua* 國畫), and the canonical works and styles of classical literature.[25] Government policies had the clear objective of elevating traditional Chinese culture above ostensibly inferior local cultural forms and languages. Attendant to these policies, non-Mandarin cultural production and the public use of non-Mandarin languages were vigorously suppressed. Corporal punishment and fines were imposed on children for slipping into Hoklo and Hakka in school,[26] and the Bureau of Culture established laws that limited Hoklo programming—including enormously popular Taiwanese opera (*gezaixi* 歌仔戲) and puppet theater (*budaixi* 布袋戲) broadcasts— to less than one hour per day on each of the three state-owned television channels.[27]

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[25] Lin Guosian 林果顯, *Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong tuixing weiyuanhui zhi yanjiu (1966-1975): tongzhi zhengdangxingde jianli yu zhuanbian* 中華文化復興運動推行委員會之研究 (1966-1975): 統治正當性的建立與轉變 [Research on the implementation of the Chinese cultural renaissance movement committee (1966-1975): the establishment and transformation of legitimate rule] (Taipei, Taiwan: Daw Shiang Publishing, 2005). For more on cultural policy relating to music during this period, see Nancy Guy, *Peking Opera and Politics in Taiwan* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 66-74. For more on "national painting" specifically, see Jason C. Kuo, *Art and Cultural Politics in Postwar Taiwan* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2000), 84-101.

[26] The KMT employed a variety of techniques to enforce its policies of monolingualism, most notably fines for speaking non-Mandarin languages in school. For additional information on language ideologies during the martial law period and after, see Todd L. Sandel, "Linguistic Capital in Taiwan: The KMT's Mandarin Language Policy and its Perceived Impact on Language Practices of Bilingual Mandarin and Tai-gi Speakers," *Language in Society* 32, no. 4 (September 2003): 523-551. Also see Jennifer M. Wei, "Language Choice and Ideology in Multicultural Taiwan," *Language and Linguistics* 7, no. 1 (2006): 87-107.

[27] Shumin Lin, "How Listening is Silenced: A Monolingual Taiwanese Elder Constructs Identity Through Television Viewing," *Language in Society* 38, no. 3 (2009): 318. Dafydd Fell elaborates further on the 1976 Radio and Television Broadcasting Law that regulated program and advertising content, limiting the use of non-Mandarin languages. See Fell, *Government and Politics*, 23.

Tensions that erupted in the 2-28 Incident continued to simmer during the martial law years, as the majority Hoklo and Hakka, as well as the Aboriginal peoples, attempted to negotiate political, educational, and socioeconomic systems that clearly favored the minority Mainlanders.

The Chiang regime's execution of these policies was bolstered by support from Washington. An abiding political, economic, and cultural relationship among the United States and ROC had begun with their joint membership in the Allied Forces during the Second World War. Following the ROC government's defeat at the hands of the Communists in 1949, the American government endorsed the continued legitimacy of the Nationalist administration as it decamped to Taiwan. Economic reforms instituted by the KMT beginning in the 1950s, with considerable financial and military assistance from the United States, created the necessary conditions for rapid industrialization and economic growth. American commitment to political stability and prosperity in the region—a defense against further incursions of Communist ideology—intensified with the PRC's entry into the Korean War. In an effort to protect Taiwan from attack, the U.S. dispatched military units to the Taiwan Strait, where they stayed until the termination of formal diplomatic relations in favor of rapprochement with the PRC in 1979.

Demands for liberalization and the end of one-party rule intensified through the end of the 1970s and mid-1980s, as the ROC's declining international status in the wake of the PRC's rise undermined the KMT's legitimacy on Taiwan.[28] The period marked the emergence of the Taiwan Localization Movement (*Taiwan bentuhua yundong* 台灣本土

[28] Fell, *Government and Politics*, 26. The 1970s saw a series of upsets in international diplomacy for the ROC, including its expulsion from the United Nations in 1971.

化運動), which called for recognition of a unique "Taiwanese" cultural identity with a separate history from China's, as well as the public embrace of non-Mandarin languages and expressive forms. In the political domain, this was accompanied by the growth of the Tangwai (*dangwai* 黨外, lit. "outside the party"), a movement comprising predominantly Native Taiwanese local elected politicians who opposed the KMT. Forming opposition political parties was illegal under martial law, but the Tangwai became increasingly intrepid in its pro-Democracy activities, giving rise to a series of brutal reprisals from the KMT and the imprisonment of the movement's primary leadership in 1980.[29] Chiang Ching-kuo, who came to power after the death of his father Chiang Kai-shek, officially declared the end of martial law and the legalization of opposition parties in 1987, and the Tangwai coalesced to form the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), a legal organization with full rights to political participation. Liberalization and the consolidation of democratic processes on the island developed progressively over the course of the next several years.

The 1980s were also a time of great change for the island's Aboriginal communities. The Aboriginal political movement emerged as Taiwan made its initial forays into democracy at the end of the twentieth century, beginning with the formation of the Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines (ATA) (*yuanquanhui* 原權會) in 1984.[30] This initiative brought together members of disparate indigenous communities and formally united them under the "Aboriginal" appellation. In 1987, the periodical *Yuanzhumin* published the

[29] Ibid., 25-26.

[30] Michael Stainton, "The Politics of Taiwan Aboriginal Origins," in *Taiwan: A New History*, ed. Murray A. Rubinstein (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 38.

first call for Aboriginal self-government, followed in 1988 by the ATA's "Manifesto of the Rights of Taiwan Aborigines."[31] Reversing the loss of land rights that followed Japanese and KMT nationalization of land in mountain areas was a central concern of Aboriginal political initiatives as they gained momentum after the end of martial law.[32] Approximately three quarters of Aborigines throughout the island identify as Christians, and the "Return Our Land" movement (*huan wo tudi yundong* 還我土地運動) found resolute support in the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, a steadfast advocate of political self-determination for the island's peoples.[33] In 1996, the Executive branch of the ROC government established the Council of Aboriginal Affairs to plan and promote "indigenous policies and affairs based on guidelines laid out in constitutional amendments, the Indigenous Policy White Paper and a new partnership agreement between Taiwan's government and indigenous people."[34] The passage of several acts protecting the economic solvency and fundamental rights of indigenous peoples has followed, although Aboriginal activists protest that officials have not yet fulfilled the promises laid out in much of this legislation.[35]

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[31] Michael Stainton, "Aboriginal Self-Government: Taiwan's Uncompleted Agenda," in *Taiwan: A New History*, 423.

[32] See Niclas S. Ericsson, "Creating 'Indian Country' in Taiwan?" *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (Winter): 33-44.

[33] Shiun-Wey Huang, "The Politics of Conversion: The Case of an Aboriginal Formosan Village," *Anthropos* 91 (1996): 426. Also see Stainton, "Aboriginal Self-Government," 434n4.

[34] "Policy Objectives," Council of Indigenous Peoples, Executive Yuan, accessed February 27, 2013, http://www.apc.gov.tw/portal/index.html?lang=en_US.

[35] Activists have become increasingly vocal in these protests over the years. See, for example, Huang Mingtang 黃明堂, "Yuanmin fang langyan yaoqiu zhengfu daoqian" 原

The years immediately following the end of martial law—during which rap music first blossomed—saw dramatic transformations in relations among ethnic communities on the island, intimately linked to shifts in the increasingly fraught political discourse about Taiwan's national identity. The Hoklo far outnumbered the Hakka in the general population and within the Tangwai, a phenomenon that reinforced perceptions of national and ethnic "Taiwaneseness" as tantamount to Hoklo-ness. And yet the first Native Taiwanese President of the ROC, Lee Teng-hui (*Li Denghui* 李登輝), is of Hakka descent. Lee, a member of the KMT, succeeded Chiang Ching-kuo as President following Chiang's death in 1988 and was democratically elected in 1996. Lee advocated for yet another identity classification, "New Taiwanese" (*xin taiwanren* 新台灣人), which "[integrated] indigenous groups, Taiwanese of Fujian descent, Hakka, and Chinese war-era immigrants into a 'community of common fate.'"[36] In a 1999 article in *Foreign Affairs*, Lee characterized the "New Taiwanese" as "those who are willing to fight for the prosperity and survival of their country, regardless of when they or their forebears arrived on Taiwan and regardless of their provincial heritage or native language."[37] As anthropologist Robert Edmondson has noted, while on one hand this construction conflicted with claims to "ethnonational Taiwaneseness based on opposition

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民放狼煙要求政府道歉 [Aboriginal peoples send smoke signals, request apology from the government], *Ziyou dianzibao* 自由電子報 [Liberty Times Online], February 28, 2012, accessed February 27, 2013, http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2012/new/feb/28/today-fo1-3.htm.

[36] Robert Edmondson, "The February 28 Incident and National Identity," in *Memories of the Future: National Identity Issues and the Search for a New Taiwan*, ed. Stephane Corcuff (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 37.

[37] Lee Teng-hui, "Understanding Taiwan: Bridging the Perception Gap," *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec., 1999): 9.

and political reform," it also suggested the possibility of rapprochement after years of conflict among multiple ethnic communities.[38]

In recent years, following the 2000 election of President Chen Shui-bian (*Chen Shuibian* 陳水扁) of the DPP, ideologies of multiculturalism and multiethnicity (*duoyuan zhuyi* 多元主義) have increasingly dominated the public discourse about national identity in Taiwan, largely supplanting Lee's "New Taiwanese" model. Following the 1996 establishment of the Council of Aboriginal Affairs, the government founded the Council for Hakka Affairs in 2001 to promote and safeguard Hakka culture and language. In the same year, the Ministry of Education began mandating the teaching of local languages in school so that students now receive instruction in Hakka, Hoklo, or Aboriginal languages from first through sixth grades with the goal of achieving basic proficiency.[39] There is evidence of the shift towards multiculturalism across numerous other domains of Taiwan's civil society, including a proliferation of electronic media channels dedicated to the promotion of Aboriginal, Hoklo, and Hakka culture and increasingly diverse offerings in the arts.[40] Even mass transit systems in Taiwan now signal deliberately to members of the island's diverse ethnic communities: although Mandarin is firmly established as Taiwan's lingua franca, subways and buses in major urban areas also announce stops in Hoklo, Hakka, and English. The flip side of these changes has been the decline of

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[38] Edmondson, "February 28 Incident," 38.

[39] Jennifer M. Wei, "Language Choice and Ideology in Multicultural Taiwan," *Language and Linguistics* 7, no. 1 (2006): 92. Mandarin remains the primary language of instruction, however, and English is also taught.

[40] For example, there are now television channels directed at the island's diverse ethnic communities, including Taiwan Indigenous TV (http://web.pts.org.tw/titv/about.htm) and Hakka TV (http://www.hakkatv.org.tw/).

cultural institutions associated with the *waishengren*—ethnomusicologist Nancy Guy has written about waning support for Peking opera, for example, as Taiwanese opera has re-risen—and their gradual political and cultural marginalization.[41]

Formal recognition of multiculturalism on the island would have seriously undermined the aims of the KMT's martial law-era sinicization programs, which were designed to foster a sense of common culture and history with the Han peoples across the Strait. In post-martial law, democratic Taiwan, however, multiculturalism-as-policy is no longer the sole province of the DPP. Although he has "described the people on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait as 'ethnic Chinese' and 'descendants of the legendary emperors, Yan and Huang,'"[42] KMT-affiliated President Ma Ying-jeou, elected in 2008, has also made explicit attempts to appeal to Native Taiwanese and Aboriginal voters, employing non-Mandarin languages in political speeches[43] and donning Aboriginal clothing during visits to majority-indigenous areas.[44] Although such gestures could be characterized as mere pandering, it is important to note that official multicultural policy on the island has remained more or less unchanged during Ma's tenure, despite his stated opposition to

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[41] Guy, *Peking Opera and Politics.*

[42] Jens Damm, "Multiculturalism in Taiwan and the Influence of Europe," in *European Perspectives on Taiwan*, ed. Jens Damm and Paul Lim (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2012), 87.

[43] Todd L. Sandel, "Linguistic Capital in Taiwan: The KMT's Mandarin Language Policy and Its Perceived Impact on Language Practices of Bilingual and Tai-gi Speakers," *Language in Society* 32, no. 4 (Sept., 2003): 524.

[44] "Ma Ying-jeou chengli yuanzhumin houyuan zonghui yun baocun yuyan wenhua" 馬英九成立原住民後援總會允保存語言文化 [Ma Ying-jeou creates council of tribal representatives, consents to save Aboriginal language and culture], *Da jiyuan* 大紀元 [Epoch Times], March 2, 2008, accessed February 27, 2013, http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/8/3/2/n2029364.htm. Aboriginal communities have traditionally been strongholds for the KMT.

Taiwan independence and considerable efforts to promote cross-Strait relations.[45]

At present, the island's population of 23 million is typically described as comprising approximately 70 percent Hoklo, 15 percent Hakka, 13 percent Mainlander, and 2 percent Aboriginal peoples.[46] These statistics, however, fall short of communicating the full complexity of the situation: identity formations in Taiwan are contingent and relative, and have been in a state of near-constant evolution since the seventeenth century. Moreover, almost seventy years removed from the end of the Second World War, there is more intermixture among Taiwan's diverse communities and more debate about what constitutes "Taiwaneseness"—as a cultural, ethnic, or political construct—than ever. Lest it should seem as though the island's peoples have routinized multiculturalism to the point of non-controversy, changing political and economic circumstances continue to complicate interethnic relations in Taiwan. This is particularly the case as China grows in global power and influence, posing new challenges to Taiwan's leadership over how to negotiate the cross-Strait relationship and balance the island's economic and security interests with its desire for continued autonomy.

A Tale From the Field

I arrived in Taiwan to begin fieldwork for this project in mid-August 2009, just days after Typhoon Morakot made landfall, triggering the worst flooding and most severe

[45] See Damm, "Multiculturalism in Taiwan, 87-88.

[46] These are commonly repeated statistics, but the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of China (Taiwan) does not, to my knowledge, publish census data regarding ethnicity, except in the case of the Aboriginal population. The government currently recognizes fourteen distinct Aboriginal groups (Amis, Atayal, Paiwan, Bunun, Tsou, Rukai, Puyuma, Saisiyat, Yami, Thao, Kavalan, Truku, Sakizaya, Seediq); several others have also petitioned for official status.

mudslides the island had seen in half a century. Before the rains receded and the clouds dissolved, 700 lives were lost and thousands of buildings and roadways had been swept away in the deluge.[47] The north of Taiwan, where I was to live with my in-laws, was mostly spared the wrath of the storm, but the south was hit hard.[48] The remote village of Siaolin (*Xiaolin* 小林) emerged in the weeks after Morakot as a symbol of the typhoon's terrible power: more than 400 residents of that town, many of them members of the Siraya (*Xilaya* 西拉雅) Aboriginal community, were buried alive in a massive landslide.[49] As late summer faded into fall, Morakot remained a central focus of public discourse amidst a seemingly endless succession of funerals, charity events, and volunteer drives. The island's television news channels developed a macabre rhythm, continually rerunning the same grainy video footage of the six-story Jinshuai (金帥) hot springs hotel collapsing into the steaming Zhiben River (知本), and continually rebroadcasting the same haunting photographs of Siaolin, no longer a vibrant township but a vast graveyard. The effects of the storm reverberated throughout the government as families of victims, led by survivors from Siaolin, argued that those living in remote areas were stranded for days before rescue teams made any effort to reach them. President Ma conceded that his administration "failed in its responsibility to protect you," but

[47] "Reconstruction Reports," Morakot Post-Disaster Reconstruction Council, accessed September 15, 2010, http://88flood.www.gov.tw/eng/Reconstruction_reports.php#idx1.

[48] "Baoyu zhongchuang nantai wushinian zui can" 暴雨中創南台 50 年最慘 ["Storm hits southern Taiwan, worst in fifty years"], *Ziyou dianzibao* 自由電子報 [Liberty Times Online], August 9, 2009, accessed February 27, 2013, http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2009/new/aug/9/today-t1.htm.

[49] "Taiwan Marks Typhoon Morakot Anniversary Event," *China Post*, August 9, 2010, accessed October 1, 2010, http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/2010/08/09/267904/Taiwan%2Dmarks.htm.

maintained that delayed response was necessary because of unsafe conditions for rescue workers.[50] Before all was said and done, the premiere and entire cabinet had resigned—many even called for Ma himself to step down.[51]

The island was alternately numb with grief and apoplectic with rage—it was, to say the least, a complicated moment in which to commence a new research project. And yet, as is often the case following natural disasters, Morakot inspired a number of creative responses from the island's artists. The rap community mobilized to raise money on behalf of storm victims, and little more than a month and a half after the flood waters subsided, I traveled to Tainan City, 56 miles west of Siaolin, to attend the "921.87 Benefit Concert." The event's name summoned memories of past trauma: "87," or August 7, refers to the day that Morakot made landfall in Taiwan; "921" alludes to a massive earthquake that struck the island on September 21, 1999, killing 2,500 and leaving 100,000 homeless.[52] The reference served as a powerful reminder to those who attended the concert, not only of previous natural disaster, but also of previous controversy surrounding the government's response to crisis. Indeed, critiques leveled at

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[50] Jacobs, Andrew. "Taiwan's Leader Faces Anger Over Storm Response," *New York Times*, August 23, 2009, accessed October 15, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/24/world/asia/24taiwan.html?_r=1.

[51] Cleo Paskal, "From Constants to Variables: How Environmental Change Alters the Geopolitical and Geo-economic Equation," *International Affairs* 85 (2009): 1148. For further information on the political fallout from Morakot, see Zhiyue Bo, "Cross-Strait Relations: Typhoon Morakot and the Dalai Lama," *East Asian Institute Bulletin of the National University of Singapore* 11, no. 2 (2009): 14. Accessed October 1, 2010. http://www.eai.nus.edu.sg/EAI%20Bulletin%20(Sept2009).pdf.

[52] Yuh-Chyurn Ding, "The Chi-Chi (Taiwan) Earthquake: Experiences on Post-Disaster Reconstruction for the 921 Earthquake" (paper presented at the Second International Conference on Urban Disaster Reduction, Taipei, Taiwan, November 2007). Archived at ncdr.nat.gov.tw/2icudr/2icudr_cd/PDF/7_3_5.pdf.

public officials following Morakot bore striking resemblance to those that followed 921, as victims accused authorities of lacking the skills and resources necessary to mount successful search and rescue missions. In a September 2010 interview, prominent underground rapper Dog G [*Tōa-ki* 大支], [53] who organized the benefit, told me that his primary goal in devising the concert was simply to encourage people to remember the storm.[54] Moreover, by linking Typhoon Morakot to the 921 Earthquake, he hoped to show that history repeats itself, that "these things must not be forgotten; next time, when it happens again, we can't forget what came before."

Although I had in my first forty or so days on the island seen a few rap shows at bookstores and live performance venues in Taipei, the benefit for Morakot provided my first exposure to the dynamics of the broader community. I had initially planned to study a range of traditional and contemporary narrative genres while on the island, but this encounter, which provided a glimpse of an incredibly vibrant and passionate body of artists and fans, inspired a dramatic rethinking of my project. Approximately fifty artists from all over the island participated in the roughly eight-hour "921.87 Benefit Concert" and organizers estimate that more than a thousand people attended, a significant turnout considering that news of its happening spread primarily by word of mouth and on the Internet rather than through mainstream media channels. Volunteers and performers actively solicited donations from the audience throughout the day. By the event's

[53] Dog G also goes by the moniker "Dazhi," which is the Mandarin iteration of "Tōa-ki." In general, I romanize personal names in this dissertation according to their Mandarin iterations, except in cases such as this where an individual is known primarily by his or her Hoklo name.

[54] Dog G 大支, personal interview, 26 September 2010.

conclusion they had collected approximately USD$2000, which was distributed to victims by the Mission Foundation of the Presbyterian Church. Musicians took a wide range of approaches to filling the ten- to twenty-minute slots allotted to them at the performance. Most mined preexisting material about a wide array of issues, including the question of Taiwan's political sovereignty, environmental degradation, and the systematic erosion of local languages and lifeways. Others presented lighter fare about partying and romance in the hopes of cheering the crowd and luring passersby into the performance area. A few artists, like Dog G, performed new songs about the storm written expressly for the benefit. The plurality—and occasional cacophony—of voices at the concert echoed the sense of disorder that followed Morakot as musicians performed their responses to the catastrophe and advocated for their own views on how to move forward.

My initial interest in the scene had developed from a long-term fascination with local forms of musical narrative performance on the island and an awareness that some artists and audiences posited Taiwan rap as an extension of traditional genres. There was, I had found, no single gloss for the English term "rap"; many Taiwan rap-related Internet sites and even some performers seemed to deploy traditional musical narrative genre names—such as the Hoklo-language *liām-kua* [唸歌, lit. "song reading"], and, less often, the more all-encompassing Mandarin-language term *shuochang* (說唱, lit. "speaking-singing"), to describe the sound and storytelling ethos of rap.[55] I did not know how widespread this conception of the music was, or whether Taiwan's rappers preferred to think of their art as more intimately connected to American and global hip-hop cultural

[55] The term *shuochang* is used to describe rap more frequently in China than Taiwan.

practice. As I observed the "921.87 Benefit Concert" in Tainan, I quickly realized that both points of view are present in the scene, as some performed music that drew audibly on traditional musical narrative forms while others invoked the sounds and visual codes of hip-hop. Whether they envisioned rap as something fundamentally local or as something localized, however, all artists on stage that day seemed to marshal the sonic resources of rap to tell stories. Group after group led the audience on narrative journeys, some to far-flung places and earlier periods of Taiwan's history, and some to more proximal times and territories. As I followed the narrative arc of each individual performance, I also began to observe the emergence of a larger composite story, one that embedded Morakot not just in a history of natural disaster in Taiwan, but also in broader sociopolitical narratives characterized by intense, often discordant relationships with government authorities.

I was particularly struck by the performance of a Tainan-based group called Brotherhood. Their song, "LUV," was written in 2008 to protest ongoing environmental degradation in Taiwan, but in the context of this particular benefit concert, the piece highlighted human responsibility for the mudslides that regularly strike rural parts of the island and that attained new levels of deadliness with Morakot ("So they blindly cut down trees, and without the retention of water or earth, the landslides accelerated…").[56] It was a melancholy performance, one that painted a series of somber pictures—of the skies growing dark, of people moving slowly off the streets, and finally of a massive mudslide washing away the dreams of children playing in the rain. The three MCs that comprise Brotherhood rapped at a deliberate pace over a plaintive, wordless melody, sped

[56] Brotherhood, "LUV," 2008, music and lyrics archived online, accessed February 27, 2013, http://tw.streetvoice.com/music/brotherhood/song/55060/.

up and looped repeatedly in the fashion of Wu Tang Clan's "Snakes" and Akon's "Mr. Lonely." The sound of lead MC Dadi's (*Dadi* 大帝) voice was soft and mellow as he spoke, barely above a whisper, of a better tomorrow: "Taiwan has suffered, you and I know, but with just a little bit of love the mother will be better." And yet, Brotherhood



Figure 1: Brotherhood performing at the "921.87 Benefit Concert," 27 September 2009. Photo courtesy of Kung Fu Entertainment.

also suggested that "love," when rendered in the form of disaster aid, is also a limited resource in this part of the world so frequently afflicted by natural disaster. At the end of the second verse, Dadi rapped: "I will not send my love out to Sichuan, but will keep my love in Taiwan." His words reflected a critical view of financial aid the Taiwan government and individual Taiwan-based donors sent to China following the Sichuan earthquake in 2008. This skepticism had a powerful visual correlate in the t-shirts worn by the MCs flanking Dadi, which bore anti-China slogans. In a performance that was

scarcely four minutes long, I bore witness to several concentric narratives rippling out all at once: there was the central story of "LUV," about a mudslide caused by soil erosion from irresponsible land development activities; the story of Morakot—and perhaps more specifically Siaolin—summoned by the song's reference to a deluge, subsequent damage to rural areas, and human suffering; and a larger story questioning the government's responses to natural disasters, including those that affect China, with which Taiwan has had an historically fraught relationship.

The "921.87 Benefit Concert" provided a powerful first exposure to the larger Taiwan rap community and the stories it tells. From a logistical standpoint, it was also where I began to establish relationships with several artists who would ultimately become key informants and personal friends. Perhaps most significantly, I first encountered rapper Chang Jui-chuan (*Zhang Ruiquan* 張睿銓), whose work I examine extensively in this dissertation, in the audience at the event. Chang approached me as I was wandering around, taking photos and purchasing hungrily whatever rap CDs I could find on sale at a kiosk abutting the performance area. As one of only a small number of women in the crowd and an even smaller number of westerners, I cut a somewhat conspicuous figure. I was holding his 2006 album *Genesis* (*Chuangshiji* 創世紀) in my hands when he struck up a conversation in English, curious as to how I'd heard of his work.[57] I explained that I had located his MySpace page, which includes streaming audio of a number of his songs, and very much enjoyed listening. We conversed for some time and I explained that I was a graduate student in ethnomusicology conducting dissertation research on the island's rap scene. Having made this initial contact, I felt comfortable asking Chang if I could

[57] Chang Jui-chuan 張睿銓, "*Chuangshiji* 創世紀 [Genesis], Adia's, 2006, compact disc.

contact him in the future for a more formal interview, to which he kindly consented.

In societies strongly influenced by Confucian teachings, maintaining *guanxi* (關係), often translated as "personal connections" or "social networks," is key to accomplishing personal and professional goals that require the favor of others.[58] Developing *guanxi* can require extensive investments of time, energy, and in some cases money, so it can be difficult to map out a timeline or even to assess the feasibility of a project until one is already in the field. I had cultivated *guanxi* over the course of more than a decade of intermittent travel and research on the island, and my husband's family, based in Taipei, has always been more than willing to introduce me to people who they think may be of some assistance with my work. When I arrived to conduct research for this project, however, I found myself somewhat at a loss: although "guanxi is transferable," meaning that "if A has guanxi with B, and B is a friend of C, then B can introduce or recommend A to C or vice versa,"[59] none of my preexisting relationships laid a clear path to members of the rap community. The initial contacts that I was able to make at the "921.87 Benefit Concert" were therefore very important—they allowed me to establish the first links in a chain that ultimately led to a number of interviews with participants in the scene. This is not to say that I was completely unable to prevail upon family and existing personal connections for help—my husband's *jiujiu* (舅舅 maternal uncle), for example, was very happy to connect me to an old friend of his who happened to have produced several seminal rap recordings and once served as the General Manager

[58] John H. Dunning and Changsu Kim, "The Cultural Roots of Guanxi: An Exploratory Study," *The World Economy* 30, no. 2 (Feb., 2007): 329.

[59] Ibid., 330.

of MTV Taiwan; and my mother-in-law called on her childhood friend, a newspaper reporter on the arts beat who maintains close relationships with a number of influential music critics. In terms of meeting musicians, however, I owe a great deal to my attendance at the "921.87 Benefit Concert" where I was able to initiate *guanxi* with the network of creative artists whose work inspired this project.

I spent approximately eighteen months engaged in fieldwork on the island, the first period of which proceeded from August 2009 to June 2010, the second from July to November 2010, and the third and last from May to July 2011. Although I regularly traveled to locations all over the island, I was based in Taipei, living in my in-laws' comfortably outfitted apartment in the Dongqu (東區 Eastern District) neighborhood of the city while my husband remained back home in Cambridge. It was occasionally difficult to balance my activities as a researcher with my familial obligations—indeed, I found myself planning my husband's and my Taipei wedding banquet in my spare hours during the first several months of fieldwork—but on the whole I found the two to be mutually nourishing roles. In my day-to-day life as a *xifu* (媳婦 daughter-in-law), I ran errands, assisted with household work, participated in important family rituals such as weddings and funerals, and socialized with family and family friends. This imparted a sense of the rhythms of daily life for many people my age in the capital city and allowed me to establish meaningful relationships outside the immediate confines of my research project. I undertook much of my fieldwork during the evenings, when most live performances transpired and when many of my research associates were free from their own work, school, and familial obligations to meet for one to four hours or more.

I conducted both formal and informal interviews with research associates, a group

that ultimately came to encompass musicians, fans, music producers, record distributors, shop owners, critics, and other scholars. Among musicians, MCs were the focus of my research, but I also had conversations with *liām-kua* performers, who I hoped would be able to provide their perspectives on the connections, if any existed, between traditional musical narrative genres and rap. Although I interviewed a number of DJs who have made important contributions to the hip-hop scene and to the development of rap music on the island, I decided at an early stage of the project to center my explorations on MC culture and creative process. While rap music is typically understood as the product of an MC and DJ's (or producer's) combined efforts, many rappers on the island compose their own instrumentals without additional assistance. Moreover, as linchpins of the club scene, DJs inhabit a vast musical world outside the realm of rap that does not bear directly on the present discussion about rap storytelling. Formal interviews typically transpired at a place of the research associate's choosing, most often a café or restaurant, but occasionally a home or studio space. I followed a semi-structured format, beginning with a core set of questions that remained relatively constant from interviewee to interviewee, but left sufficient space for conversations to take their own direction.[60] Interviews were conducted in either Mandarin or English, whichever language the parties involved decided would be both most expedient and most pleasurable. Although Mandarin is a first language for the vast majority of those I interviewed, many artists were conversant, if not fluent, in English and eagerly embraced the opportunity to practice their skills. In terms of informal interviews, I engaged those I encountered at performances and other types of events as often as possible, and typically found them to

[60] See Appendix A for a list of core interview questions.

be extremely forthcoming about their feelings about rap.[61] As my relationships with musicians developed and I spent more time engaged in the process of what Clifford Geertz famously referred to as "deep hanging out," opportunities for informal conversations proliferated.[62] Maintaining *guanxi* necessitates some degree of reciprocity; while I did not offer financial compensation for interviews, I was happy to purchase coffee or tea when meeting in teahouses or restaurants and attempted to offer non-financial assistance to research associates whenever it was needed. This sometimes entailed importing difficult-to-procure books to Taiwan from the United States, helping to review graduate school application essays, providing English translation services, and at one point featuring in a university student's final documentary project for a film class. I was, overall, humbled by the generosity of musicians who agreed to meet with me, many of whom considered inclusion in the project to be sufficient compensation for participation.

I attended any and all rap-related events that I could during my time on the island, including public lectures, fan club events, university hip-hop club meetings, and even artists' birthday parties. I also tried to observe performances in as many kinds of settings as possible, including but not limited to club and festival environments, university campuses, political events, and shopping malls. Eager to observe changes in performance practice and variations in audience response outside of Taiwan, I followed one group—Kou Chou Ching (*Kao qiu qing* 拷秋勤)—overseas to shows at the Mosaic

[61] I did not conduct any systematic surveys of audience demographics or responses to performances, but hope that a future iteration of this project will include data gleaned from such sources.

[62] Clifford Geertz, "Deep Hanging Out," in *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 107-117.

Music Festival in Singapore and Telus TaiwanFest in Vancouver. The Internet was an absolutely indispensible tool for finding out about performances both near and far. Conducting fieldwork just over a decade ago, I was reliant on newspapers, listings at ticket kiosks, and word of mouth for information regarding live shows, and I often missed important events even when I committed myself to checking these sources faithfully. In the era of Facebook, MySpace, Street Voice, Bulletin Board Systems, and other online social media and information technologies, however, I regularly receive notifications that an artist is about to perform or a special event is about to take place.

Taiwan's youth are extremely plugged into the online sphere via computers and smartphone devices, so the Internet quickly became my medium of choice for contacting people to meet for interviews, as well. Following my encounter with Chang Jui-chuan at the "921.87 Benefit Concert," I sent him a friend request on Facebook accompanied by a private message asking if he would be available to speak at some point. As he accepted my request and sent a reply, it occurred to me that the use of Facebook or email rather than the telephone conferred some unique advantages: firstly, it created a virtual paper trail, which I could reference later when writing up fieldnotes; secondly, it gave research associates access to some of my personal information. The latter point seemed potentially transformative of the fieldwork experience, as it added a degree of reciprocity to our interactions—they had the opportunity to learn about me, even as I learned about them. Once we connected on Facebook, for example, Chang Jui-chuan had access to information about my education and family background, and could even view a selection of pictures that I had posted of personal celebrations and vacations. I have always tried to exercise caution in my use of social media, so I do not typically post things online for

my "friends" that I would not readily share with colleagues or even the general public. I was glad for Chang to have the chance to learn more about me in advance of our meeting and welcomed any additional questions about my life or work that he might have. Since returning to Cambridge from Taiwan, the Internet has allowed me to remain in regular contact with my research associates and has given me easy access to information regarding their performance schedules, album releases, and significant events in their personal lives.

This engagement with social media both at home and in the field inspired no small degree of reflection about the ways in which my personal identity impinged on the fieldwork experience. In general, my status as a westerner did not elicit much response from my research associates, who are at this point accustomed to the sight of ex-pats and in many cases have numerous non-Taiwanese friends. Likewise, my affiliation with Harvard University, which many in East Asia perceive as the pinnacle of American higher education, rarely emerged as a topic of conversation, although there can be little question that the status of "Harvard student" is a marker of privilege on the island and certainly opens many doors. For some, the fact that I am married to a Taiwanese-American man was an indicator of my credibility, and they took pains to refer to me as a "Daughter-in-law of Taiwan" (*Taiwan xifu* 台灣媳婦) when complimenting my research efforts or introducing me to others. The gendered quality of this gesture, and the nature of the "western-woman-with-local-man" arrangement it implies, occasionally gave me pause. Attitudes towards couples oppositely configured—that is, western men married to local women—tend to elicit less favorable responses from Taiwanese men, who

sometimes perceive such relationships as reflective of colonial fetish desires.[63] When my husband came to visit Taiwan on his breaks from medical school, he would occasionally accompany me to performances and once or twice participated in informal interviews. Although I cannot know with any certainty the effect that his presence had on my interactions with research associates, it did seem to open new avenues for discussion about views on family and marriage, which are central concerns for young people on the island today and which I deal with extensively in this dissertation.

Exchanging accounts of personal experiences with my research associates was a critical part of my research process—the stories we shared over coffee and tea overlapped and intertwined with the stories emergent in rap performances, including those I first took in at events like the "921.87 Benefit Concert." As I listened to interviewees speak about their childhoods, relationships, educations, workplace experiences, and views on politics and current events, I slowly arrived at a clearer understanding of the broader narratives that engender such stories and in which such stories are embedded.

Adjacent Scholarly Narratives

Musicologist Keith Negus writes that while scholars have noted the importance of narrative in media from written fiction to ritual spectacle, "the popular song—one of the most pervasive narrative forms that people encounter in their daily lives—has been almost entirely ignored in the vast literature on narrative."[64] A field of study with deep

[63] See Sunny Woan, "White Sexual Imperialism: A Theory on Asian Feminist Jurisprudence," *Washington and Lee Journal of Civil Rights and Social Justice Law* 14, no. 2 (2008): 275-301.

[64] Keith Negus, "Narrative, Interpretation, and the Popular Song," *The Musical Quarterly* 95, no. 2-3 (Summer-Fall 2012): 368.

roots in literary studies, narratology has seemed more or less oblivious to the contributions that musical sound, popular song in particular, might make to its theoretical formations. Moreover, as Negus points out, "whereas narratological methods have often featured in the interpretation of Western art music and film music, and literary approaches to lyrics have sometimes emphasized a poetics of storytelling, theories of narrative have rarely been foregrounded in the study of popular songs."[65] Indeed, musicologist Carolyn Abbate's *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (1991), composer Martin Boykan's *Silence and Slow Time: Studies in Musical Narrative* (2004), and music theorist Byron Almén's *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (2008), to name only a few relatively recent studies, are concerned not with popular but with art musics. In the seminal article "Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?" Jean-Jacques Nattiez argues strenuously that "music is not a narrative and that any description of its formal structures in terms of narrativity is nothing but superfluous metaphor," but limits his investigations solely to European instrumental musics that lack literary texts.[66] In the realm of popular music studies, scholars focusing on country music, such as Aaron Fox and Jocelyn Neal, have been among the few to emphasize the importance of narrative in songwriting practices and audience interpretation.[67]

But rap seems to call out for analysis as narrative: rap vocal and semantic

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Jean-Jacques Nattiez, "Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?" trans. Katharine Ellis, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 115, no. 2 (1990): 257.

[67] See Aaron Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) and Jocelyn R. Neal, "Narrative Paradigms, Musical Signifiers, and Form as Function in Country Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 41-72.

strategies have antecedents in an array of Afro-diasporic oral narrative traditions, including West African *jeliya*, Jamaican toasts, and the African-American verbal games known as the dozens. These connections and others underscore the music's contemporary identity as a form for telling tales, as hip-hop scholar Imani Perry has put it: "The narrative in hip hop is a kind of storytelling, a late-twentieth century and early-twenty-first-century extension of traditional African-American folktales, the MC replacing Dolemite or Brer Rabbit."[68] Storytelling is also ubiquitous in the discourse *about* rap music, which has, as a genre, often been credited with "telling the stories" of the socially disenfranchised, economically disadvantaged urban communities that gave rise to it in the United States and elsewhere. As if speaking to this point, American megastar Jay-Z writes in the concluding pages to his 2010 memoir *Decoded*: "That's my story. But the story of the larger culture is a story of a million MCs all over the world who are looking out their windows or standing on street corners or riding in their cars through their cities or suburbs or small towns, and inside of them the words are coming, too, the words they need to make sense of the world they see around them."[69] In Taiwan, the notion of rap as storytelling derives doubly from the community's familiarity with American hip-hop cultural practice and, for some, its associations with local musical narrative traditions. The words of one artist with whom I spoke, DJ Mr. Gin, closely echoed Jay-Z's: "Hip-hop stuff, it's about life, the lyrics record your life or somebody else's life. You're telling a story, so you want to use appropriately realistic language and

[68] Perry, *Prophets*, 78. Cheryl Keyes has also written extensively about rap's antecedents in various Afro-diasporic musical storytelling traditions. See Cheryl Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 17-25.

[69] Jay-Z, *Decoded* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 208.

let other people know that this song, its lyrics, they express strong things."[70]

I engage Taiwan rap as a storytelling genre because I believe that hearing songs as stories is critical to understanding how the music is constituted as meaningful to artists and audiences on the island. Numerous scholars from Paul Ricoeur to Hannah Arendt have explored how storytelling enables individuals to—as Jay-Z puts it—"make sense of the world they see around them."[71] Anthropologist Elinor Ochs and psychologist Lisa Capps offer that narrative "is an essential resource in the struggle to bring experiences to conscious awareness…Personal narratives shape how we attend to and feel about events. They are partial representations and evocations of the world as we know it."[72] Through creating narratives, which Roland Barthes reminds us is a transhistorical as well as transcultural practice,[73] storytellers claim a sense of agency and gain a sense of control over personal and community circumstances.

I borrow the term "politics of storytelling" from anthropologist Michael D. Jackson, who invokes Arendt in exploring how the process of telling stories is equally a

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[70] DJ Mr. Gin, personal interview, 6 February 2010.

[71] See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-1988). In brief, Ricoeur argues that narrative is a critical means by which human beings make sense of temporal existence. Arendt's notion of storytelling takes a variety of different shapes in her writings, but can be understood partially as, in philosophy scholar Annabel Herzog's words, "the only way to represent the fragmentary nature of individual life, which fights and collapses between past and future, and later reappears crystallized." Annabel Herzog, "Illuminating Inheritance: Benjamin's Influence on Arendt's Political Storytelling," *Philosophy Social Criticism* 26, no. 5 (Sept., 2000): 9. Arendt outlines her views of storytelling most extensively in *The Human Condition* (1958).

[72] Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps, "Narrating the Self," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25 (1996): 21.

[73] Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," *New Literary History* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1975): 237.

mode of social and political action.[74] In discussions of narrative in the lives of a World War Two veteran from New Zealand, part-Aboriginal children institutionalized because of post-war Australian assimilationist policies, the Kuranko of Sierra Leone, and others, Jackson is inspired by Arendt's deployment of storytelling as both a tool for theorizing about politics and making, as political scientist Lisa Disch has put it, "critical understanding from experience."[75] Through storytelling, Jackson argues, we constitute ourselves as active authors rather than as passive observers of our experiences. Moreover, storytelling functions as a powerful technique for self-actualization: "[There] is no denying that storytelling gives us a sense that though we do not exactly determine the course of our lives we at least have a hand in defining their meaning. Stories, like the music and dance that in many societies accompanies the telling of stories, are a kind of theatre where we collaborate in reinventing ourselves and authorising notions, both individual and collective, of who we are."[76] I contend that music does not merely *accompany* the telling of rap narratives but is rather an equal partner in meaning-making.[77] Nevertheless, Jackson's point regarding storytelling's capacity to restore senses of order and agency, and furthermore to operate as a mode of social and political action, is central to my work in this project.

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[74] Michael D. Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002).

[75] Lisa T. Disch, "More Truth That Fact: Storytelling as Critical Understanding in the Writings of Hannah Arendt," *Political Theory* 21, no. 4 (November 1993): 666.

[76] Jackson, *Politics*, 16.

[77] I venture into the particularities of what constitutes "story," "storytelling," and "narrative" in Part Three.

I situate this research within a growing scholarly conversation exploring the ongoing relevance of rap music as a site for articulating and negotiating local cultural values and processes. During the past two decades, a vital discourse has developed around the academic study of hip-hop, centered primarily on examination of the social, political, and economic exigencies that gave rise to rap music in the United States (e.g. Rose 1994; Potter 1995; Keyes 2002; Perry 2004; Forman and Neal 2004; Chang 2005, 2006; Sharpley-Whiting 2007; Morgan 2009; Bradley and DuBois 2010; White Hodge 2010). Building on this literature, scholars have expanded their horizons to assess hip-hop's numerous global configurations (e.g. Mitchell 2001; Basu and Lemelle 2006; Alim, Spady, and Meghelli 2006; Alim, Awad, and Pennycook 2009; Terkourafi 2010; Charry 2012), focusing primarily on how rap music mobilizes questions about the ethics of global capitalism, disrupts nationalist discourses of authenticity, and constitutes resistant political speech. For the most part, the nascent literature on global hip-hop has concerned itself with European, South American, Caribbean, and African contexts, and scholars have thus far paid relatively little attention to numerous lively scenes that have sprung up across the Asian continent.[78] Answering Tony Mitchell's call for work on Chinese-language rap music in the groundbreaking collection *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (2001), a small group of scholars has only recently begun to explore the invocation of hip-hop aesthetics in Mandopop (Fung 2008; Chen 2012), the influence of hip-hop on youth culture in the PRC (Liu 2010), and the poetics and politics of

[78] An exception to this trend has been the significant effort to study the works and cultural practices of rap artists in Japan. For two examples, see Ian Condry *Hip-hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), and Noriko Manabe, "Globalization and Japanese Creativity: Adaptation of Japanese Language to Rap," *Ethnomusicology* 50, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 1-36.

underground rap in Hong Kong (Lin 2009), including its associations with local narrative forms (Li 2010). I intend to fill a lacuna in this conversation, which has yet to consider the wealth of Mandarin, Hoklo, Hakka, and Aboriginal-language rap music from Taiwan.

Alongside the growing literature on global hip-hop, my research also contributes to understandings of contemporary expressive culture in the relatively new field of Taiwan Studies, which has to this point maintained a near-exclusive focus on post-martial law film and literature (e.g. Yip 2004; Berry and Lu 2005; Davis and Yeh 2005; Chen and Davis 2007; Lin 2007). This dissertation responds to a growing interest among ethnomusicologists, comparative literature specialists, and area studies scholars in the production and consumption of mass-mediated popular music on the island (e.g. Yang 1993, 1994; Wang 1997; Lin 2003; Fung 2008; Guy 2001, 2009; Moskowitz 2008, 2009, 2010). Given the longstanding importance of Taiwan as an epicenter of popular music culture in the Sinophone world, scholarship on the subject is overdue.

Structure of the Dissertation and Overview of Contents

I divide the dissertation into three main parts, which might be characterized in order as broadly historical, ethnographic, and analytical. There is, naturally, overlap among these endeavors—the historical discussion relies on information gleaned from ethnographic research, the ethnography encompasses a fair amount of analysis, and so on. This systematic approach emerges from a desire to make legible the complex experience of fieldwork and to tell a coherent story about Taiwan rap where none exists in any previous scholarly text.

In Part One, "The Beginning(s) of Rhyme: Constructing Rap's Multiple Pasts," I approach the history of rap in Taiwan as itself a narrative construction, subject to revision

and reinterpretation at the hands of multiple authors. In this spirit, I unfold not one but three discrete yet interconnected histories, each anchored by a different term used locally to designate "rap." The first term, *xiha* (嘻哈), is a Mandarin transliteration of "hip-hop," invoking an ethos with roots in Afro-diasporic cultural practices and emphasizing Taiwan's location in the global circulation of hip-hop culture. The second term, *raoshe* (饒舌), Mandarin for "rhapsodizing tongue," frames rap as a musical technique demanding verbal agility of its performers and foregrounds the early deployment of rap by artists identified not with hip-hop but with rock and folk genres. The final term, *liām-kua* [唸歌], Hoklo for "song reading," casts rap as a species of musical narrative performance with affinities to local storysinging traditions. By examining rap in its guises as *raoshe*, *xiha*, and *liām-kua*, I gesture toward a historically rigorous understanding of how rap came into existence in Taiwan, as well as a more subjective exploration of how current musicians—who are the focus of this dissertation and the primary sources from which it springs—understand their music in dialogue with an array of pasts. Both undertakings are critical to grounding a discussion about history in the ethnographic present and to shedding light on the ways artists vary in what they perceive rap to be saying and doing.

Part Two, "Keeping it Real: Exploring Rap's Interpretive Community," takes as its primary point of departure Imani Perry's argument for the centrality of community in American hip-hop discourses of authenticity. In this spirit, I examine the various communities that give rise to the rap community in Taiwan—whose stories Taiwan's rappers seek to tell—with further recourse to literary theorist Stanley Fish's notion of

"interpretive communities."[79] I argue that those who participate in the performance and consumption of rap in Taiwan constitute an interpretive community, one that coheres around not only shared affection for the music, but also shared participation in a set of diverse rituals and organizations. I divide my discussion into two main parts, the first focusing on demographic representation in Taiwan rap vis-à-vis the interlocking categories of ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. I take the initial step of examining the ethnic profile of the scene and ponder rap as a site for the (re)articulation and (re)authorization of Mainlander, Hoklo, Hakka, and Aboriginal community narratives. I continue by exploring rap storytelling—and, by implication, rap's stories—as expressions of gendered subjectivity. As part of this investigation, I consider performers' and fans' perceptions of hip-hop in Taiwan as essentially masculine in both sound and sentiment. Finally, I establish the rap community's covalence with the middle class in Taiwan and consider the music's engagement with socioeconomic issues in terms of class-specific concerns about Taiwan's future in the shadow of mainland China's rise. In the second part, I summon the work of philosopher Edward Casey in focusing on the places that "gather" the rap community in their midst.[80] These include localities, the geographical places from which community members hail and that they seek to represent; places of learning, the locations upon and through which the community identifies and negotiates shared musical and extramusical values; and places of production, the sites

[79] Stanley E. Fish, "Interpreting the *Varorium*," *Critical Inquiry* 2 (Spring 1976): 465-85.

[80] Edward S. Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena," in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996).

that gather the experiences, sounds, languages, and stories that this dissertation takes as its core objects of exploration.

The third and final part of the dissertation foregrounds rap's specificity as a narrative genre to examine more closely the music's poetics and politics. I focus on both the stories rappers tell and the means by which they tell them, in the process exploring works that reflect or construct larger narratives about Taiwan as a nation, as well as those that engage smaller, more specifically contextual narratives about relationships, family, school, and work. Once again, I divide this part into two main sections. The first section explores the means by which rap stories are expressed, including accounts of both their musical and linguistic features. My discussion of musical sound focuses dually on aspects of vocal performance, including flow, vocal quality or timbre, and enunciation, and aspects of accompaniment to the voice, including the use of samples, original instrumentals, and environmental sonorities. My discussion of language considers both the politics of language and how the unique sonic signatures of Mandarin, Hoklo, and Hakka figure in the creative process of making rap. In the second section of Part Three, I turn my attention to the kinds of stories rappers tell, briefly examining three story types that proliferate in Taiwan rap: stories about history, stories about gender and sexuality, and stories about the vicissitudes of everyday life. These, I argue, instantiate strategies for self-actualization and community empowerment in the years after the end of martial law.

Part One

The Beginning(s) of Rhyme: Constructing Rap's Multiple Pasts

Actually, the beginning…the beginning…
well, it depends on how you define rap.[1]

-Dog G (*Tōa-ki* 大支)

The various glosses that exist for "rap" in Taiwan tell different stories. As the "rhapsodizing tongue" (*raoshe* 饒舌), rap is a musical technique that demands verbal agility of its performers; as "hip-hop" (*xiha* 嘻哈), it is an ethos with roots in Afro-diasporic cultural practices; and as "song reading" [*liām-kua* 唸歌], it is a species of narrative performance with affinities to local storysinging traditions. That rap operates by these several aliases lends richness to a discussion of its present life in Taiwan and complexity to the project of identifying its origins. Patently multivalent and flexible, capable of assuming a variety of identities, rap means in different ways to different people.

I began this study by asking performers to provide an account of the development of rap in Taiwan, for, in the absence of a body of scholarship on the subject, I hoped to glean firsthand how an array of musicians understand the present scene in relation to the past, and vice-versa. The request yielded a dizzying array of starting points and timelines, and elicited wildly divergent ideas about which events had proven formative for the

[1] Dog G 大支, personal interview, 26 September 2010.

community. Most interviewees agreed on the shape of a historical narrative within the past 15 years, noting the role of Taipei-based MC Hotdog (*Regou* 熱狗) and Tainan-based Dog G in popularizing and legitimizing rap as not just an adjunct to other styles, as it had been for some time, but rather as an independent and self-sufficient project. With respect to the years prior to these artists' 1998 debuts, however, accounts of rap music on the island were more mutable: some emphasized the profound influence of predominantly African American hip-hop culture that traveled to Taiwan via television, radio, and record imports beginning in the mid-1980s; others highlighted the contributions of Taiwanese rock musicians who first experimented with Mandarin- and Hoklo-language rap during the late 1980s; and still others referred to rap as primarily a re-imagined, "modernized" incarnation of longstanding narrative traditions that date to the Ming and Qing dynasties.[2]

The profusion of alternative histories communicated to me resonates with the multiplicity of terms my research associates had used to refer to the music. Dog G's response to my probing for historical knowledge speaks plainly to this idea, that how one answers the question of the music's history in Taiwan in fact depends to a great extent on how one defines rap. In other words, those who understand rap as participating in a globalized, cosmopolitan *xiha* culture might be more likely to attribute historical

[2] Writing about the development of the southwestern Nigerian genre jùjú, ethnomusicologist Christopher A. Waterman has explored similarly the contingency of accounts of music history, describing how "alternative levels of explanation" may emerge depending on the intellectual orientation of the historian. He notes that "Each method is important as a way of 'putting the jigsaw puzzle together' (Bateson 1958:281), but no single one accounts exhaustively for what is known about continuity and change in jùjú style." See "*Jùjú* History: Toward a Theory of Sociomusical Practice," in *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History*, ed. Stephen Blum, Philip Vilas Bohlman, and Daniel M. Neuman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 49-50.

importance to Taiwan's earliest encounters with African American rap music; those who understand rap as an extension of *liām-kua* practice might highlight how the history of rap bonds to that of local narrative practices, and so forth. In observing that there are many ways of designating rap and that each inspires different approaches to thinking about the music, I do not intend to indicate the lurking presence of a linguistic relativism, a sense that understandings of rap are determined by whatever words are used to signify it. On the contrary, I suggest that rap as a conceptual category permits its performers in Taiwan to inscribe within it a variety of meanings that in turn open on to many pasts.

In Part One, I invoke the multiple glosses for rap as a device for accommodating and unfolding diverse accounts of the music's development.[3] I begin by considering rap in terms of its identity as *xiha*, revealing the story of hip-hop's proliferation, transformation, and localization on the island. I outline Taiwan's location in the global circulation of hip-hop culture and provide a rough sketch of the formation of a thriving hip-hop-oriented rap scene. I then turn to an exploration of rap's origins in terms of its identity as *raoshe*, emphasizing the early deployment of rapping musical techniques among artists identified not with hip-hop but with rock and folk genres. Through this I hope to shed light on how rap can be understood to reflect a broader syncretic impulse in Taiwan's popular music, which has from its inception seen the borrowing and refashioning of musical ideas from other places. Finally, I present rap in terms of its identity as *liām-kua*, contemplating its presence in Taiwan as a continuation of longstanding local "song reading" traditions. Departing from my approach in the

[3] I borrow the construction "Unfolding the History of…" in the heading of each subsection of Part One from Melissa Brown, who refers to "narratives of Taiwan's unfolding" in *Is Taiwan Chinese?: The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 19.

previous two histories, I position rap here not as intrinsically foreign but as familiar to Taiwanese audiences long acquainted with and hospitable to storytelling as a mode of musical performance.

UNFOLDING THE HISTORY OF *XIHA*

Many performers trace their earliest interests in rap to a fascination with predominantly African American hip-hop culture that began to travel to Taiwan during the mid-1980s. They describe first hearing songs by Billboard Top 40 stars like Young MC, MC Hammer, and Vanilla Ice and developing a fever for hip-hop that led them ever further underground, to artists like Common, Talib Kweli, and Dilated Peoples. To this day, they remain intimately connected to both mainstream and underground hip-hop in the United States, voracious consumers of the latest and greatest. Anthropologist Ian Condry has argued that "Japanese hip-hop needs to be understood not as some disembodied form of culture from one locale to another, but rather in terms of cultural production that is animated through the local scene and the national market."[4] Condry's dictum is equally instructive where Taiwan hip-hop is concerned: even as they follow the trends from overseas, Taiwan's rappers have been engaged in the process of discovering their own approaches to hip-hop for more than two decades. Though palpably inspired by American models, they cast hip-hop through the prism of a distinctively "Taiwanese" cultural logic. It issues forth in local languages, sounds off on local cultural politics, and resonates with local soundscapes. It possesses what might be called an American hip-hop ethos, but it is profoundly transformed in telling the stories that matter most to local

[4] Ian Condry, "A History of Japanese Hip-Hop: Street Dance, Club Scene, Pop Market," in *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*, ed. Tony Mitchell (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 224.

audiences. Intertwined with the history of a globalizing American hip-hop, Taiwan hip-hop—*Taiwan xiha*—has history of its own.

The Birth and Multiple Migrations of Hip-Hop

Hip-hop culture converged on the streets of the South Bronx during the mid-1970s, and by the early 1980s it had begun to gain traction in urban and suburban areas beyond New York City, as well as in a variety of global contexts outside the United States. In "Hip-Hop and the Global Imprint of a Black Cultural Form," hip-hop scholars Marcyliena Morgan and Dionne Bennett remind us that "the particulars of hip-hop's more recent emergence reveal an old story of how African American culture has circulated throughout the world," reaching back through the nineteenth century to the transatlantic travels of the Fisk Jubilee singers and to the global tours of blues, jazz, and rock and roll musicians during the twentieth century.[5] Hip-hop advanced this journey another step, but its movement in the late twentieth century was distinguished from what came before by a new speed and efficiency: Aided by "the processes of corporate globalization and new—especially computer-based—technologies for musical production and distribution," hip-hop seemed to transfuse communities worldwide almost overnight.[6]

Radio, film, and television facilitated hip-hop's pre-Internet expansion, particularly as rap songs began to penetrate the U.S. Billboard charts and thus filter into the current of popular culture flowing outward from North America. In 1979, the Sugarhill Gang's

[5] Dionne Bennett and Marcyliena Morgan, "Hip-Hop and the Global Imprint of a Black Cultural Form," *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 140, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 182.

[6] Ibid., 7-8.

single "Rapper's Delight" cracked the Billboard Top 40 and quickly became a fixture of radio playlists and a crowd favorite in discos around the world.[7] Following closely on its heels, the 1982 film *Wild Style* served as an initial point of contact with a broader hip-hop culture for many outside the United States.[8] Although shot on a shoe-string budget and distributed by an independent studio, the film played in theaters from Athens to Tokyo, introducing international audiences to seminal artists like Grandmaster Flash, Fab Five Freddy, and the Rock Steady Crew, and showcasing rap, turntablism, graffiti, and breakdance as elements of a composite hip-hop cultural experience.[9] Television was slower to tap into the growing audience for what was by the mid-1980s a certifiably global phenomenon: hip-hop debuted on MTV in 1986 with a cover of Aerosmith's "Walk This Way" by Queens-based rappers Run-D.M.C. and gained widespread exposure with the 1988 premiere of a program dedicated exclusively to hip-hop, *Yo! MTV Raps*. A platform for new videos, live performances, and on-air discussions about hip-hop, *Yo! MTV Raps* became the network's highest-rated show within months.[10] It was broadcast on several of MTV's overseas sister channels and spawned similar programs abroad, like the German Viva network's *Freestyle*.[11]

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[7] Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation* (New York NY: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 131.

[8] *Wild Style*, directed by Charlie Ahearn (Rhino Home Video, 1983).

[9] See Bennett and Morgan, "Global Imprint," 182; Mitchell, *Global Noise*; and Ian Condry, *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) for additional accounts of *Wild Style*'s global circulation.

[10] Chang, *Can't Stop*, 419.

[11] Sabine von Dirke, "Hip-Hop Made in Germany: From Old School to the Kanaksta Movement," in *German Pop Culture: How "American" is it?* ed. Agnes C. Mueller (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 96-98.

But tapping into these signals posed a challenge to audiences based in Taiwan, where the dawn of hip-hop collided with the twilight of martial law. The government held a monopoly over broadcast media from the end of the 1940s until the early 1990s,[12] a period during which radio and television served primarily as mechanisms to "supplement the established political system and social values."[13] Radio stations were subject to federal jurisdiction and television was restricted to sanctioned content on three channels operated by the central government, the KMT, and the military.[14] Free-to-air entertainment options were relatively limited at this time: a handful of variety shows and singing contests nurtured the development of the local Mandopop industry and programs focusing on the Billboard charts confined themselves to mainstream American artists like Michael Jackson and Madonna. Moreover, dance halls were forbidden and nightly curfews enforced, curbing dissemination of popular musics in concert, club, and party environments. Those who caught wind of hip-hop—either through travels abroad or English-language radio—leaned on black market hawkers and importers to gain further access to recordings and visual media. A founding figure of the Taipei scene, DJ Chicano Chien (*Jian Guangting* 簡光廷) awakened to hip-hop in 1988, while he was still a high school student. Much of his initial contact with the culture necessarily resulted from illicit activity: his first encounter with turntablism was at an underground dance

[12] Government Information Office, "Mass Media," Republic of China (Taiwan) Government Entry Point, accessed September 9, 2011, http://www.taiwan.gov.tw/lp.asp?ctNode=1916&CtUnit=907 &BaseDSD=7&mp=1001.

[13] Huang Ching-Lung, "The Changing Roles of the Media in Taiwan's Democratization Process" (working paper, Brookings Institution: Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies, Washington, D.C.), 3.

[14] Ibid., 4.

club, the albums he purchased were locally manufactured pirated versions, and his primary portal to music videos was a neighbor's bootleg satellite television hookup.[15]

Chicano was inspired to begin seriously collecting hip-hop recordings after seeing the video for Young M.C.'s 1989 track "Bust a Move" on *Yo! MTV Raps*, which he accessed via the aforementioned satellite connection. Galvanized by the performance, he immediately traveled to Ximending (西門町, "West Gate District"), Taipei's epicenter of youth culture and a hub for entertainment-related businesses. Failing to find a pirated copy of *Stone Cold Rhymin'*, the album on which "Bust a Move" appeared, he located a record shop that agreed to place a special order. Although the shop owner chastised Chicano for wanting to spend his money on a pricey American rap import—fifty to a hundred times more expensive than the pirated music most kids his age were buying on the street—Chicano was undeterred. Once he had the album in hand, he pored over the liner notes, ravenous for clues about what he ought to buy next:

> The cover of the vinyl said who had done what, who the producer was, who Young M.C. wanted to thank…He wanted to thank many other rap artists, and I saw he had written about people called Eric B. & Rakim, DJ Jazzy Jeff, and so on. And so I went to look for these people and slowly started to buy more and more.[16]

Other first-generation members of Taiwan's underground scene imparted similar stories to me about their attempts to access rap recordings at the end of the 1980s, remarking repeatedly on how difficult they were to locate, how expensive they were to import, and how their purchase often elicited expressions of bemusement from shop owners who

[15] DJ Chicano Chien 簡光廷, personal interview, 14 June 2011.

[16] Ibid.

simply couldn't fathom hip-hop's appeal.

Chicano and his contemporaries were willing to expend significant time, effort, and money overcoming these obstacles, and they reveled in the detective work of tracking down new artists to enjoy. Even with their varying degrees of English proficiency, they were as energized by the musical qualities of hip-hop as by their haphazard understanding of its textual (and contextual) meanings. But these dedicated listeners were a rarity among Taiwanese audiences, who overwhelmingly found hip-hop mystifying in terms of its cultural, linguistic, and musical modes of expression. As Henry Louis Gates has noted, hip-hop lyrical content frequently "complicates or even rejects literal interpretation" and "demands fluency in the recondite codes of African American speech."[17] Metaphors, puns, and plays on words that animate rap lyrics often aspire to obfuscation, challenging even native English speakers to decipher their coded meanings.[18] For the most part, local listeners simply did not have the requisite English fluency, let alone the familiarity with African American vernacular language, to participate in this challenge. Moreover, they were unacquainted with the stratified layers of African American cultural history upon which hip-hop was constructed: the dozens, the comic routines of Pigmeat Markham, the spoken word poetry of Gil Scott-Heron, and the philosophical teachings of Afrika Bambaataa were more or less unknown on the

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[17] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., foreword to *The Anthology of Rap*, ed. Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), xxv.

[18] Bradley and DuBois, *Anthology*, xxxvi. Imani Perry has also written about "the self-conscious incomprehensibility of hip hop lyricism," and the ways in which "[difficulty] is a strategy in hip hop, both in terms of words, which are fast and hard to understand if you are not privy to the hip hop community, and of demands for an authentic personal connection to hip hop and its geography, the hood." See Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 50-51.

island.

That said, the story of global hip-hop bears testimony to the music's ability to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries worldwide. The more significant obstacle for Taiwanese audiences, as MC Teacher Lin (*Lin Laoshi* 林老師) of the group the Tripoets (*Sanpi* 參劈) has speculated, was a lack of familiarity with the musical styles that helped give rise to hip-hop:

> In America, rap music developed from the music that DJs played in dance halls. But because of long-standing restrictions on dance implemented under martial law, dance halls were considered illegal places of gathering. It was only in 1988 after the lifting of martial law…that dance halls and DJs began appearing in Taiwan in earnest. In the era of dance restrictions, Taiwan missed out on the golden age of disco taking place elsewhere. And it was precisely the rousing rhythms and melodies of disco, soul, and funk that provided an important musical foundation for rap music.[19]

Lin implies that an appreciation of hip-hop is predicated on prior exposure to its musical roots, a contention that is difficult to demonstrate given the nature of music as a subjectively experienced phenomenon. Nevertheless, he makes a salient point regarding the effects of martial law strictures on the reception of hip-hop, which emerged to Taiwanese listeners at the end of the 1980s seemingly out of nowhere, a sonic bolt from the blue. In addition to its linguistic challenges, Lin suggests, its musical novelty rendered hip-hop doubly foreign, doubly unknown.

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[19] Teacher Lin 林老師, Ill Mo 老莫, and Shortee 小個, *Sanpide raoshe da jihua* 參劈的饒舌大計劃 [Da project] (Taipei: Linking Books, 2008), 13. Imani Perry also provides a brief but illuminating discussion about "attention to the ancestors, to the history behind the music" in hip-hop, focusing on how popular music "from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s has continually surfaced as samples and hooks for hip hop music." See Perry, *Prophets*, 54-57.

The Proliferation and Popularization of Hip-Hop Dance

Thus far, I have focused on the various challenges to hip-hop's circulation in Taiwan, revealing the ways in which the cultural and sociopolitical climate of the 1980s conditioned rap's dissemination on the island. Even as Chicano and fellow fans struggled to gain access to rap recordings, however, many young people readily consumed mainstream American cultural exports that showcased other aspects of hip-hop culture. In particular, the early part of the decade was notable for the formation of a number of dance groups who found inspiration in mainstream American movies like *Flashdance* (1983).[20] That film, which featured a memorable sequence in which pioneering breakdance group the Rock Steady Crew b-boyed to the Jimmy Castor Bunch's "It's Just Begun," played widely in cinemas on the island and enjoyed tremendous popularity among local audiences. It induced young people to gather in schoolyards, parks, and paved open spaces to emulate the Crew's moves and to experiment with locking, popping, and foundational techniques like the windmill. It is interesting to note that while martial law prohibitions drove dance halls underground, they did not seem to discourage street dance, very likely because it transpired out in the open, typically during the daylight hours. Rehearsals on the steps of the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall or in the airy avenues of Ximending could be monitored by authorities more easily than the potentially illicit activities—drug trafficking, prostitution, or political organizing—that might have accompanied dancing behind closed doors.

By and large, Taiwan's budding b-boys and b-girls were unaware of street dance as part of a larger hip-hop movement and therefore did not associate it with either rap or

[20] Ill Mo 老莫, personal interview, 3 March 2010.

turntablism.[21] The Rock Steady Crew's performance in *Flashdance* was not accompanied by rap but by funk music, and indie films like *Wild Style* that made a deliberate display of hip-hop's various integrated elements never played in Taiwan's theaters. Chicano notes that through the early 1990s, dancers in Taipei frequently approached him for advice on what kind of music they ought to be dancing to:

> People who were breaking at that time, they had no idea what kind of music they should be using. They didn't really know about hip-hop. They would come and ask me [because I was learning to be a DJ], and I would suggest that they use music from the 70s and 80s like James Brown. They'd reply "Right, right! We were watching a foreign dance video and they used that kind of music, but we didn't know what it was or how to find it."[22]

According to George Chang, who hosted a variety of shows dedicated to dance musics on MTV Taiwan from 1995 until 2005, the island's youth gained access to knowledge about dance from programs they watched on bootleg satellite television and imported instructional videos. Japan, already home to a vibrant street dance scene in the 1980s, was the source of many of these videos, which guided amateurs through the basics as they had been absorbed through contact with American hip-hop and pop music culture in Tokyo.[23]

Even unmoored from a sense of hip-hop culture as the synthesis of several elements, street dance amassed a prodigious following in Taiwan. Vanilla Ice and MC Hammer fueled the craze when their eminently danceable singles "Ice, Ice Baby" (1990) and "U Can't Touch This" (1990) penetrated the upper reaches of the Billboard Hot 100 and

[21] DJ Chicano, personal interview.

[22] Ibid.

[23] George Chang, personal interview, 22 June 2011.

consequently gained exposure in Taiwan through chart review television and radio programs. By the early 1990s, Taiwan's dance scene had developed a reputation in the Asia-Pacific region for its tremendous vitality, and reporters from overseas television networks like the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) began traveling to the island to film up and coming crews on the streets of Ximending.[24] As the trend developed, television talent shows like *Five Lights Contest* (*Wudengjiang* 五燈獎), broadcast every Saturday on the government-owned Taiwan Television Enterprise channel, established "hot dance" (*remen wudao* 熱門舞蹈) competitions that brought crews like The 800 Dragons and Gestapo (*Gaishitaibao* 蓋世太保) to national prominence.[25] The phenomenal growth and sustained popularity of street dance in Taiwan merits an extended discussion that is unfortunately beyond the scope of this dissertation. For our purposes, however, I would like to note the significance of dance in demonstrating to Taiwan music industry executives that hip-hop, packaged specifically as commercial dance music, could be marketed successfully to local audiences. Indeed, as several dance groups attained celebrity status, record companies hoping to capitalize on their popularity contracted them to produce albums as well.

Manufacturing Hip-Hop for Local Audiences

By far the most successful of these dancer-cum-musician acts was the LA Boyz, which consisted of clean-cut, California-bred, Taiwanese-American brothers Jeff Huang

[24] Ibid.

[25] Li Jingyi 李靜怡, "Taiwan qingshaonian xiha wenhuade rentong yu shijian" 台灣青少年嘻哈文化的認同與實踐 [Taiwanese youth hip-hop culture, identity, and practice] (master's thesis, National Cheng Kung University, 2007), 81.

(*Huang Licheng* 黃立成) and Stanley Huang (*Huang Lixing* 黃立行), and their cousin Steven Lin (*Lin Zhiwen* 林智文). The group was groomed by record label executive Mi Chonghua (*Ni Chonghua* 倪重華)—who had worked with an array of critically acclaimed rock artists and would later serve as General Manager of MTV Taiwan—to make waves as the island's first hip-hop teen idols.[26] Mi first spotted the trio during a dance performance on the Five Lights Contest and brought them together with composer Jerry Lo (*Luo Baiji* 羅百吉), also originally from California, to record their first album *SHIAM!* (*Shan* 閃) in 1992.[27] In collaboration with Lo and Mi, the LA Boyz fashioned an image for themselves that profited immensely from their status as Americans, capitalizing on perceptions of Americanness as hip, cosmopolitan, and proximal to "authentic" hip-hop culture.

The group endeavored to make hip-hop relevant and palatable to local audiences, a task they accomplished in part by performing in a mixture of elementary English, Hoklo, and Mandarin. This linguistic alloy emerged organically from the language competencies of the LA Boyz themselves, who had grown up in the United States speaking English, but conversed with their grandparents almost exclusively in Hoklo.[28] They modeled their compositions closely after songs that had achieved mainstream success in the United States, most notably by artists like pre-teen rap duo Kris Kross. The title track off their second album *Jump* (*Tiao* 跳) hews closely to the formula of Kris Kross' "Jump," going

[26] Mi Chonghua 倪重華, personal interview, 23 August 2010.

[27] LA Boyz, *SHIAM!* 閃, Pony Canyon, 1992, compact disc.

[28] Mi, personal interview.

so far as to lift the title, deploy many of the same rhymes, and mimic its musical gestures. Indeed, the songs are virtually identical, apart from several lines in the first verse that call out specifically to the LA Boyz' desire to make hip-hop a Taiwanese proposition:

I am jumping and I'm humping and I'm pumping to the beat,
And I never ever met a rapper faster than me,
With the big fat blabber mouth rappers of the 90s,
Jerry's gonna make his rap funky in Chinese.
First you gotta start off with the ABC's,
Then you gotta learn it like the Taiwanese,
Bopomofo sure sounds easy to me,
But then you gotta spell it LA BOYZ![29]

Performed by Steven Lin, the verse begins with lyrics that plainly reproduce Kris Kross's rousing and boastful refrain, "I got you jumpin' and bumpin' and pumpin', movin' all around,"[30] but quickly shift their focus to making rap "funky in Chinese." According to the LA Boyz, this task originates in knowledge of the English language ("the ABC's") but can derive equally from an understanding of "bopomofo," a phonetic system widely used in Taiwan to represent the sounds of Chinese logograms.[31] There is some irony to the fact that Lin delivers this rallying call in English rather than Hoklo or Mandarin, calling into question the intended effect of the song: was its audience imagined to be local listeners or other Taiwanese Americans like the LA Boyz themselves? In terms of sales it ultimately did not matter—"Jump" was a smash hit on the island.

I interviewed Mi Chonghua, twenty years removed from his experiences working with the LA Boyz, and was intrigued to hear him dismiss the project as little more than

[29] LA Boyz, "Tiao" 跳 [Jump], *Tiao* 跳 [Jump], Pony Canyon, 1992, compact disc.

[30] Kris Kross, "Jump," *Totally Krossed Out*, Sony, 1992, compact disc.

[31] This system, studied by most children on the island, is known more formally as *zhuyin fuhao* (注音符號). The colloquial name "bopofomo" refers to the first four phonetic syllables in a sequence of thirty-seven.

"fake hip-hop" (*jiade hip-hop* 假的hip-hop). I could sympathize with the sentiment as the group's performances drew brazenly on American models to an extent that bordered on plagiarism. Additionally, although all three were competent dancers and charismatic personalities, none of the LA Boyz particularly excelled at the actual performance of rap, spitting lyrics at awkward speeds and with a clumsy sense of rhythm and rhyme.[32] For Mi, however, the most significant index of the LA Boyz' inauthenticity was that they did not generate their own material. Hip-hop scholar Tricia Rose has written of rap lyrics as "closely linked with the author" and "the voice of the composer and performer," but the LA Boyz were a commercial "idol act" (*ouxiang tuanti* 偶像團體) expressly engineered to break through to a broad and untapped consumer base the way that MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice had in the United States.[33] Their lyrics, by and large, did not emerge from their personal life experiences but were the imaginings of a team of hired guns.[34] In spite of Mi's skepticism, it is important to note that many current members of the Taiwan rap scene credit the LA Boyz with demonstrating that hip-hop music could be made by and for people in Taiwan. Furthermore, they were the first on the island to consolidate rap, dance, and turntablism as elements of an integrated hip-hop aesthetic—a fundamental shift from what had come before.

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[32] Hip-hop scholar Paul Edwards has documented extensively assessments of rap technique by American performers; I assess the LA Boyz' performance using criteria he lays out in *How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-Hop MC* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009).

[33] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 87.

[34] Collaborating with songwriting teams was, and remains, normative practice in Taiwan's mainstream music industry. Artists who compose and perform their own material are something of an exception.

Mi tried his hand at reproducing the LA Boyz phenomenon with another dance-focused hip-hop act made up of seven teenagers from Taipei, The Party (*Le paiti* 樂派體). The group did not ascend the lofty heights of its predecessors, but it achieved modest success with the 1994 single "Monkey on my Back" (*Monkey zai wo bei* Monkey在我背). The Party diverged from the LA Boyz in that its members performed in Mandarin with only occasional recursions to English catchphrases ("awwww yeah!"), countering the perception that rap music could only be performed convincingly by Americans and in the English language. Moreover, tracks like "Monkey on my Back," which sampled Kool and the Gang's "Jungle Boogie" (1973), evinced a new awareness of the musical styles that gave rise to hip-hop in the United States and a desire to deploy them in original compositions. Although the group were together for a scant few years and released only one full-length album, their activities structured an important transitional moment in the development of Taiwan *xiha*.

Like the LA Boyz, The Party relied on some of Taiwan's most experienced pop lyricists, composers, and arrangers for material, including Jerry Lo, C.Y. Kong, David Tao (*Tao Zhe* 陶喆), and He Qi Hong (*He Qihong* 何啟弘), among others. But, as Mi explained, some unexpected challenges arose from marketing The Party as a homegrown alternative to the LA Boyz: "We couldn't write anything too 'Taiwan-style' for the LA Boyz, because they were foreigners. We had to write things in an American style. The Party was local, so we had to search for lyrics with a little more depth."[35] In other words, that the LA Boyz were fluent in English, proficient in Hoklo, and mostly unfamiliar with Mandarin—a linguistic orientation exactly opposite to their audience's—relegated them

[35] Mi, personal interview.

to simple texts that both they and listeners could readily comprehend. The Party, acquainted with local cultural practices and capable of using relatively complex Mandarin, could more easily sell what Mi called "Taiwan-style" words and music. Mi called on 30-year-old Zhu Yuexin (朱約信), a folk singer-songwriter, to contribute his local sensibilities to the project. But while Zhu collaborated successfully with the group for "Monkey on my Back" and several other tracks, Mi turned his other compositions away:

> Zhu Yuexin wrote some songs and showed them to me and I immediately knew they were completely inappropriate for The Party. So I told him to come and meet me and I said, "These words won't do." And he was quite depressed…But then I said, "You should perform them, your own style suits them."[36]

The three albums that resulted from this exchange, Zhu's *Funny Rap* series [*Tshiò-khui liām-kua* 笑魁唸歌], departed significantly from the commercial, dance-oriented sound of the LA Boyz and The Party. Lyrically sophisticated and musically adventurous, they charted a radically different course for hip-hop in Taiwan.

The Rise of Jutoupi

A slender, bookish man from Tainan who held a day job as a deacon for the Presbyterian Church, Zhu was an unlikely rap star. To perform the songs he had originally written for The Party, he contrived a bold new persona called "Jutoupi" (*Zhu Toupi* 豬頭皮)—literally "Pig Headskin"—an alter-ego whose surname "Pig" (豬) punned his actual surname "Zhu" (朱). As a creative entity, Jutoupi was as engaged with social and political activism as Zhu Yuexin but far more mischievous, a trickster figure

[36] Ibid.

with a scathing, acerbic wit. The *Funny Rap* series was not so much funny, however, as satirical: in Jutoupi's hands, hip-hop developed a critical voice and a consciousness, brought to bear on songs addressing controversial topics like electoral fraud, safe sex, and the "continuing fog surrounding Taiwan's political and cultural identity."[37] Indeed, 1994—the year that saw the release of the first album in the series—could be described as a time of upheaval on the island, as lawmakers worked to consolidate democratic processes through open gubernatorial and mayoral elections, the government loosened its grip on mass media, and the public engaged in a series of bitter debates about the future of Taiwan sovereignty. Diverging from the carefree pop aesthetic of the LA Boyz and The Party, Jutoupi envisioned hip-hop as a means of negotiating these new sociopolitical realities.

A response to the changes sweeping Taiwan in the mid-1990s, the theme of madness suffused the *Funny Rap* series and found rich expression in Jutoupi's textual and musical designs. A sense of chaos engendered by this madness is apparent even in the liner notes, where a series of titles both refer directly to insanity and *are* insane by virtue of their linguistic inconstancy. To offer one example, Jutoupi provides the English title *Jutoupi's Funny Rap* for the first album in the series, but its Mandarin name *Wo shi shenjingbing* (我是神經病) actually glosses as "I Am Crazy."[38] The first track on the album goes by that same Mandarin title, but Jutoupi provides a second alternative English

[37] Nancy Guy, "Syncretic Traditions and Western Idioms: Popular Music (Taiwan)," in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Online*, http://glnd.alexanderstreet.com (accessed October 14, 2011).

[38] Jutoupi 豬頭皮, *Wo shi shenjingbing* 我是神經病 [Jutoupi's funny rap], Rock Records, 1994, compact disc.

translation that gestures even more wildly toward insanity: "You Sick Suck Nutz Psycho Mania Crazy Taipei City." Rapid code-switching among seven languages—Hoklo, Mandarin, Hakka, English, Japanese, French, and Bunun—further augments the sense of mayhem, particularly as dynamic word play gives rise to numerous cross-linguistic puns that compel listeners to question precisely what it is they have just heard.[39] Jutoupi's sonic sensibilities induce similar feelings of delirium: in collaboration with Jerry Lo, he drew samples from a variety of disparate sources, including Japanese popular songs from the 1930s, Hoklo and Hakka folk tunes, Mandarin *shidaiqu*, American rock and jazz, and Taiwan Aboriginal musics, among others. Taken together, the narrative content of the songs, their languages of performance, and their musical features all speak to a feeling of social disorder.

It is useful to examine some of the sociopolitical changes briefly outlined above in relation to the reception and dissemination of hip-hop on the island during this period. In 1993, liberal reforms precipitated the end of the government monopoly over mass media. New radio frequencies were released, and multi-channel cable and satellite television service providers officially entered the Taiwan market such that the number of entertainment options available to consumers mushroomed virtually overnight.[40] At the

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[39] Chen Peichen 陳培真 undertakes exploration of indexical reference, phonetic strategies, pragmatic strategies, and code-switching in Jutoupi's work in her master's thesis, "Waixianshi goutongzhong shuozhe yu tingzhe zhijiande guanxi: yi Zhutoupide raoshe ge weili" 外顯式溝通中說者與聽者之間的關係：以豬頭皮的饒舌歌為例 [The speaker-audience relationship in ostensive communication: Jutoupi's rap songs] (master's thesis, National Taiwan Normal University, 1998).

[40] Government Information Office, "Television," Republic of China (Taiwan) Government Entry Point, http://www.taiwan.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=45125&ctNode=1916&mp=1001 (accessed October 12, 2011). Shortly after the government legalized multi-channel cable and

same time, rap artists in the United States had begun to proliferate, diversify stylistically, and make incursions into the mainstream of popular music. Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois note that 1993 and 1994 "marked a kind of second-wave hip-hop golden age" with the release of albums like the Wu-Tang Clan's *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)*, A Tribe Called Quest's *Midnight Marauders*, Snoop Dogg's *Doggystyle*, De La Soul's *Buhlōōne Mind State*, Nas's *Illmatic*, and Common's *Resurrection*, among many others.[41] Departing from the pop ethos of Vanilla Ice, MC Hammer, and Young MC, they acquired reputations as authors of "some of the most psychologically compelling, formally sophisticated lyrics in hip-hop history."[42] With expansion of the Taiwan media market, more and more of these artists reached those who were inclined to listen. Jutoupi's approach to rap as a field for linguistic play and sampling as a process of intertextual allusion clearly reveals their influence.[43]

While current participants in Taiwan's underground rap scene consider Jutoupi a hip-hop innovator and I myself have referred to him as a hip-hop artist in this narrative, it is important to note that Zhu Yuexin balked at that suggestion when we discussed his work in 2010. Prior to the *Funny Rap* series, Zhu was a folk singer and activist; today he performs pop and Christian rock. His adventures as Jutoupi were a happy accident,

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satellite television, local music channels began to spring up. Channel V, owned by STAR TV and Fox International Channels, initiated broadcasting in Taiwan in 1994. MTV Taiwan followed shortly thereafter, in 1995. For more on Channel V, see http://www.startv.com.tw/chv/.

[41] Bradley and DuBois, *Anthology*, 330.

[42] Ibid, 325.

[43] My language here is inspired by Tricia Rose's reference to sampling in rap as "a process of cultural literacy and intertextual reference." See Rose, *Black Noise*, 89.

arising from his activities as a songwriter-for-hire rather than from a personal investment in transforming hip-hop culture:

> We studied De La Soul and Public Enemy, but it wasn't like we listened to them and thought, "Ah, we have to make [hip-hop] music." It was the social concerns they wrote about, the attitude of their songwriting, their techniques that we could learn and insert into funk, folk, rap, anything.[44]

To this point, while Jutoupi drew readily on the "techniques" and "attitudes" of hip-hop, his music resists easy categorization as such: amid the flurry of languages and diverse musical styles that populate the *Funny Rap* soundscape, hip-hop often seems less a constituting force than a musical reference among numerous other musical references. Moreover, as music critic Ma Shih-fang (*Ma Shifang* 馬世芳) suggested to me, those who purchased Jutoupi's albums did not necessarily *receive* the music as hip-hop:

> [Audiences] just thought it was interesting music, hilarious music, because he sampled a lot of old Japanese pop songs and foreign pop songs from all over the world…So together [with Luo Baiji] they made a new kind of music which was blending different kinds of music…It was very interesting to listen to.[45]

While hip-hop might have inspired Zhu to experiment with sampling, the sounds and lyrical gestures associated with hip-hop do not dominate the other musics in his songs, but emerge almost as samples themselves. Indeed, it is difficult to locate a primary musical orientation in the *Funny Rap* series, to discern if Jutoupi is a hip-hop artist sampling Taiwanese folk music and Japanese pop, or if it is the other way around.

For Zhu Yuexin, *Funny Rap* was a site for experimentation and for thinking

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[44] Jutoupi 豬頭皮, personal interview, 10 October 2010.

[45] Ma Shih-fang 馬世芳, personal interview, 18 January 2010.

through new ways in which popular music could engage the sociopolitical in Taiwan. Many of the performers I interviewed credited him with bringing hip-hop aesthetics into spirited dialogue with local languages and sounds, and cited him as a formative influence on their own artistic development. But even as Zhu, the LA Boyz, and The Party helped to demonstrate that hip-hop could be "made in Taiwan" as readily as semiconductors and cheap textiles, the music did not attract the audience that it had in the United States, and as such no other Taiwanese MCs were immediately forthcoming.

The Birth of a Hip-Hop Community

Concurrent with these early forays into local hip-hop, a burgeoning club scene continued to enlarge the presence of American rap music in Taiwan. Multinational music retailers like Tower Records and smaller independent music shops opened for business, and a growing number of DJs doggedly pursued imported recordings and promoted hip-hop in club environments whenever possible. Although MC activity is the focus of this dissertation, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge the critical role that DJs played in raising awareness of hip-hop culture and creating a sense of community around the act of listening and dancing to hip-hop music. Particularly instrumental in this regard were Chicano and his high school classmates Sam and Goldie, who formed a consortium of dancers and DJs called Doobiest, named in tribute to California underground rap outfit Funkdoobiest.[46] Doobiest organized a series of monthly parties in Taipei, creating a space for social interaction among DJs, street dancers, and graffiti artists, as well as non-performers who were passionate about hip-hop. If Taiwan had indeed missed out on

[46] Although the Taiwanese Internet is in a constant state of transformation and websites are often abandoned by their authors after a short period of time, Blogger currently hosts a stable homepage for Doobiest at http://doobiest.blogspot.com/.

developing an active club scene during the period of martial law, these events effected some degree of remediation. DJ, b-boy, and rapper Shortee (*Xiao Ge* 小個) of the Tripoets, who was a member of the Doobiest crew, notes that the parties were tremendously popular among performers and fans alike, a place to see and be seen: "Everyone wanted to go—it was a must at that time."[47]

As a community gradually coalesced in Taipei, those living in other parts of the island also sought means of identifying and engaging others who shared their interests. In 1997, eager to connect with fellow fans, MC Teacher Lin and a high school classmate started an Internet forum devoted to discussion of all things hip-hop. Called Master U, it was a beacon for its founders, who lived in central Taiwan and felt isolated in their musical tastes:

> Back then I seriously thought I was the only one listening to hip-hop music in Taiwan because Taichung was very far away from Taipei back then, information-wise. So I always thought I was alone until we started the Internet forum. We got some guys posting news and music, like twenty of them. And that's when I knew I wasn't alone.[48]

Compared to genres like Mandopop, consumption of which accounted for the majority of Taiwan's USD$170 million popular music market, the audience for hip-hop was small.[49] Master U furnished individuals outside of major urban areas with a mechanism for locating kindred spirits with whom to exchange recordings and information. Those who

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[47] Shortee 小個, personal interview, 3 March 2010.

[48] Teacher Lin 林老師, personal interview, 18 October 2010.

[49] The USD$170 million estimate I provide here is based on a 1999 figure given in Guy, "Syncretic Traditions." Music industry executives to whom I spoke in Taiwan provided the same or similar number in conversations about the value of the music industry between 1995 and 2000.

signed on, almost exclusively teenage males, were extremely motivated participants: they posted reactions to the latest releases, discussed the history of hip-hop in the United States, and debated the identities of its most distinguished practitioners. In time, they developed an understanding of hip-hop not just as a system of aesthetic conventions but as a lifestyle and an ethos with deep roots in America's urban black and Latino communities.

Prior to the forum's establishment, fans who struggled to understand rap lyrics and English-language articles about hip-hop were more or less on their own; Master U facilitated group discussion and assisted in the procurement of knowledge that would have been difficult to come by independently. Both the Doobiest events and the forum enacted a significant transformation on the experience of listening to hip-hop in Taiwan: what was once a solitary activity suddenly acquired the clout of a social network. In *The Real Hiphop: Battling for Knowledge, Power, and Respect in the LA Underground*, Marcyliena Morgan examines the importance of community in the production and consumption of American hip-hop, with particular attention to the sustenance provided by what she terms core and long-term members. The core typically comprises "adolescent males and females between twelve and seventeen years of age who listen to, memorize, and write raps (cf. Wheeler 1992), dress in the current hiphop style, keep up with the current dances, and often tag or at least practice graffiti writing."[50] Doing research and sharing information is central to their process of learning about hip-hop, as they "discover meanings by scanning websites, listening to interviews, and talking to

[50] Marcyliena Morgan, *The Real Hiphop: Battling for Knowledge, Power, and Respect in the LA Underground* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 55.

friends, cousins, and others from other parts of the country."[51] As the core matures, it produces long-term members, who are between their late teens and middle twenties and "consciously participate in hiphop culture, populate the underground, become critics, and search out haters."[52] Core and long-term members are the heart of a community; hip-hop culture depends on their participation and their periodic regeneration to remain vital. The inception of both Doobiest events and Master U gave rise to a core in Taiwan that behaved much as Morgan describes. Participants networked with one another, studied American—and occasionally Japanese and Korean—models assiduously, and shared their findings whenever possible. In Part Two of this dissertation, I explore in detail the importance of other organizations that succeeded Doobiest and Master U in the production of hip-hop music in Taiwan. Let it for now suffice to say, however, that those who got their start participating in Doobiest events and the Master U forum developed over time into the long-term members that currently populate Taiwan's rap scene.

I have proposed that the three glosses invoked for "rap" in Taiwan address themselves to consideration of three separate but overlapping histories, the first of which—now unfolding—reveals how hip-hop culture has been disseminated on the island and reworked by local artists. In interviews, I found that performers and fans who locate Taiwan rap within a hip-hop paradigm tended to trace the music's beginnings to the years that followed the establishment of Doobiest and Master U. It was during this period that new core members of Taiwan's burgeoning hip-hop community began to experiment with their own approaches to making rap music: writing lyrics, posting them

[51] Ibid., 57.

[52] Ibid., 59.

online, and workshopping them with others. Unique standards for evaluation arose from these efforts, as participants merged knowledge of hip-hop criticism gleaned from American sources with their own definitions of creative success. Master U has since receded into the dark abyss of the Internet, replaced by newer discussion groups and social networking technologies, so it is not possible to reconstruct the precise process by which users came to understand certain kinds of approaches as successful and others as unsuccessful. Consideration of the work of two participants in the forum who acquired reputations as "godfathers" of hip-hop in Taiwan—Yao Zhongren (姚中仁), better known as MC Hotdog, and Ceng Guangrong (曾冠榕), better known as Dog G—provides some indication of the newly emerging local stylistic preferences, however. To those who understand rap in terms of its identity as hip-hop, these individuals are frequently referred to as Taiwan's first bona fide MCs.

MC Hotdog and Dog G, Architects of Taiwan Hip-Hop

MC Hotdog was a student in Taipei, where he was born and raised, when he first began to write lyrics and experiment with making beats in the late 1990s. Galvanized by a passion for American hip-hop and a desire to give it a Mandarin-language voice, he purchased a Roland MC-505 MIDI sequencer and tried his hand at recording original material and performing, first for classmates at the prestigious Taipei Municipal Jianguo High School (*Taibei shili jianguo gaoji zhongxue* 台北市立建國高級中學) and then on the campus of Fu Jen Catholic University (*Furen daxue* 輔仁大學), where he enrolled for university studies.[53] As word of his music spread around the Internet and students began

[53] MC Hotdog 熱狗, personal interview, 12 August 2010.

to download his homemade tracks, Hotdog was emboldened to take his act onto the nightclub circuit. There, he was spotted by executives from independent record label Magic Stone (*Moyan changpian gongsi* 魔岩唱片公司), who offered to help him make a high-quality demo and arranged for a performance with his frequent Master U collaborator Dog G at Spring Scream (*Chunna yinyueji* 春吶音樂祭), a major annual outdoor music festival in southern Taiwan.[54] The exposure was a tremendous boon to his popularity on the island, and before long Magic Stone had signed both Hotdog and Dog G. Together with Taiwanese-American rappers 168 and Witness (黃崇旭), singer and producer J. Wu, and DJ Xiao Si (小四), they formed a crew known as Big Circus (*Da maxituan* 大馬戲團), which Magic Stone ultimately developed as a subsidiary label.[55] Continuously honing his material in pubs, live houses, and nightclubs, Hotdog released four consecutive EPs in 2001, which sold hundreds of thousands of legitimate copies in Taiwan and an unknown but possibly even greater number of black market copies in both Taiwan and China. Things quieted down somewhat between 2003 and 2005, during which time the rapper fulfilled his mandatory military service requirement. Relentless touring, often with pop artist Chang Chen-yue (*Zhang Zhenyue* 張震岳), followed his return to performing, and since 2006 he has released three additional full-length studio albums.

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[54] The Spring Scream Festival, now a major performance venue for independent and mainstream bands in Taiwan, was started in 1995 by American expatriates Jimi Moe and Wade Davis. I interviewed Moe in August 2011, and he recounted the tremendous frenzy that erupted when MC Hotdog and Dog G took the stage for the first time at the event in 2000.

[55] Witness, personal interview, 24 May 2011.

Over the past decade, Hotdog's sound has undergone a number of transformations, but early songs like "Let Me Rap" (*Rang wo rap* 讓我rap), "Korean Wave Invasion" (*Hanliu laixi* 韓流來襲), "Cram, Cram, Cram" (*Bu bu bu* 補補補), and "My Life" (*Wode shenghuo* 我的生活)—tremendously influential to the artists who have followed him—provide an indication of the broader stylistic changes afoot in rap music at the beginning of the new millennium. Quite apart from the pop stylings of the LA Boyz and the madcap antics of Jutoupi, these songs revealed a new affinity for hardcore hip-hop after the fashion of Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur. Adopting a more aggressive stance than his predecessors, the rapper's voice seethed with anger and frustration; his lyrics were alternately somber and confrontational, riddled with English and Mandarin expletives. In "Let Me Rap" and "Korean Wave Invasion" he accused Taiwan's commercial music industry of privileging physical beauty over artistry and, in the latter track, invited female pop stars with a purported propensity for vapid speech—or "shit from the mouth"—to come and "suck [his] dick."[56] "Cram, Cram, Cram" addressed the intense social pressure to succeed within the bounds of Taiwan's rigid educational system, encouraging listeners to boycott the national high school examination and resist spending their youth as passive "studying machines" (*dushu jiqi* 讀書機器).[57] In addition to its emphasis on social critique, MC Hotdog's early work established rap in Taiwan as a forum for the realization of personal narratives, especially ones characterized by conflict. "My Life" is a

[56] MC Hotdog 熱狗 ft. Dog G and MC 168, "Hanliu laixi" 韓流來襲 [Korean wave invasion], *Quan* 犬 [Dog], Magic Stone, 2001, compact disc.

[57] MC Hotdog 熱狗, "Bu bu bu" 補補補 [Cram, cram, cram], *Hagou bang* 哈狗幫 [MC Hotdog], Magic Stone, 2001, compact disc.

particularly striking example in this regard, as it tells the story of Hotdog's path to becoming a musician—a story marked by deviation from parental expectations, the struggle to support himself financially, and ongoing episodes of doubt and disappointment.[58] In this excerpt, the rapper introduces his "dog" persona not with bravado but with self-laceration:

走在西門町　看到很多流浪漢
感嘆地笑一笑怎會有種親切感
原本流浪漢的身邊都有一隻流浪狗
只是沒有錢幫狗植入晶片他就一無所有
我也是流浪狗　嘴裡含著麥克風想問
誰又　真正的在乎我

walking in Ximending, I saw many drifters
and laughed and sighed at my bond with them
every drifter had a stray dog
but without the money to microchip it, he really had nothing
I'm like a stray dog, holding a microphone in my mouth
who really cares about me

These lyrics convey a palpable feeling of alienation, presumably the consequence of Hotdog's pursuit of an unconventional life path in Taiwan. His experience is encapsulated in the melancholic image of the stray dog and the vagrant who is too poor to claim him; the rapper suggests that he is like that dog, alone and disconnected, isolated from others by his calling to performance. Expressions of such estrangement and nonconformism pervade MC Hotdog's early music, which invokes hip-hop ideals of heterodoxy and "keeping it real" as it explores the various challenges, conflicts, and contradictions inherent in the lives of Taiwanese youth.

Dog G, with whom Hotdog has collaborated regularly since his Master U days, has

[58] MC Hotdog 熱狗, "Wode shenghuo" 我的生活 [My life], *Quan* 犬 [Dog], Magic Stone, 2001, compact disc.

also exerted significant influence in shaping Taiwan's rap scene, particularly in the south of the island. Born and raised in Tainan City, he was enrolled in the judo program at the Taipei College of Physical Education (*Taibei tiyu xueyuan* 台北體育學院) when he first began to contemplate the possibility of working as a professional musician.[59] Over time, he had made a name for himself as a knowledgeable and creative participant in discussions on Master U and was eager, as he explained to me in a 2010 interview, to try writing songs "using my own language [Hoklo], and dealing with the life going on around me." Dog G made his debut with MC Hotdog at Spring Scream in 2000 and was thereafter signed to Magic Stone Records as a member of the Big Circus crew. In late 2002, he released his first full-length album, *Lotus From the Tongue* (*Shecan lianhua* 舌粲蓮花), which featured his now-signature track "Taiwan Song" [*Tâi-uân sóng* 台灣 Song].[60] Although Dog G's star was beginning to rise with his transition from amateur performer to recording artist, he returned to his hometown in the south of Taiwan when Magic Stone, prey to the island's weakening commercial music industry, dismantled its operations in 2003. With Tainan again as his base, he began to connect with other rappers arrayed throughout the city, arranging group activities and performances in the hopes of encouraging the growth of a vibrant, local hip-hop community. His efforts were successful, and the community that had formed at his urging gradually coalesced into an organization known as Kung Fu Entertainment (*Renren you gonglian* 人人有功練). A

[59] Dog G, personal interview.

[60] Dog G 大支, "Tâi-uân sóng" 台灣 Song [Taiwan song], *Shecan lianhua* 舌粲蓮花 [Lotus from the tongue], Magic Stone Music, 2002 compact disc. The English word "song" in the title and chorus puns with the Hoklo *sóng* 爽 ("cool" or "fly") such that the phrase "Taiwan song" can be heard as meaning both "song of Taiwan" and "Taiwan's where it's at."

decade later that organization is both the physical and spiritual center of hip-hop in Tainan: it has a brick-and-mortar office that encompasses a school for aspiring rappers, recording studio, and dedicated spaces for writing and socializing.

Despite his ongoing associations with MC Hotdog and the pair's shared roots in Master U, Dog G's music has long suggested a somewhat different approach to making hip-hop in Taiwan. Both artists have from the beginnings of their careers promulgated a notion of hip-hop as a form of cultural resistance, a way of challenging what Mark Slobin has termed the "superculture": "The usual, the accepted, the statistically lopsided, the commercially successful, the statutory, the regulated, the most visible."[61] But where MC Hotdog's early songs mirrored the vicissitudes of daily life for young people in Taiwan and directed their critique at mainstream popular culture, Dog G's notion of keeping it real manifests with senses of local consciousness and political activism. Indeed, *Lotus From the Tongue* is performed almost exclusively in the Hoklo language, with limited Mandarin and English interjections, and in tracks like "Taiwan Song" the artist forcefully advocates recognition of both a distinct Taiwanese identity and a hip-hop with corresponding local specificities. As this excerpt demonstrates:

你甘有聽到這條歌　恭喜啦
這就是正港的台灣Hip-hop
…
這是啥米歌　台灣爽
是叨位最爽　台灣爽
吃是台灣米　誰　喝是台灣水　你
生是台灣人　我　死是台灣鬼　他
這是啥米歌　台灣爽
是叨位最爽　台灣爽

[61] Mark Slobin *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 29.

台灣人的愛　這　台灣人的愛　那
台灣人的愛　都在台灣之聲

have you heard this song, congratulations
this is real Taiwan hip-hop
...
what song is this, Taiwan song
where do you belong, Taiwan song
what you eat is Taiwanese rice, who, what you drink is Taiwanese water, you
live as a Taiwanese person, me, die as a Taiwanese spirit, he
what song is this, Taiwan song
where do you belong, Taiwan song
the love of Taiwanese people, here, the love of Taiwanese people, there
the love of Taiwanese people is in the voices of Taiwan

Rousing and anthemic, the lyrics sound a rallying cry that Dog G hoped would inspire listeners to "stop being ashamed of being Taiwanese."[62] This notion of shame refers, of course, to residual effects of the KMT's longstanding sinicization policies as well as to growing anxieties about the island's ability to maintain its economic prosperity and de facto sovereignty against a rising tide of mainland Chinese influence. With this context in mind, Dog G endeavored to keep hip-hop real by establishing it as a viable vehicle for political engagement on the island: elemental references to rice, water, life, and death invoked a nativist literary sensibility, and the song's strident, pro-Taiwan tenor revealed the influence of a consolidated Taiwanese cultural nationalism that emerged in the 1990s.[63]

Among those I interviewed, MC Hotdog and Dog G are widely credited with initiating the development of an underground rap scene in Taiwan. Teacher Lin, a long-

[62] Quoted in Andrew Perrin, "What Taiwan Wants," *Time Magazine*, 15 March 2004.

[63] For a complete discussion of nativist literature in Taiwan, including its symbolic vocabulary, see Ming-yan Lai, *Nativism and Modernity: Cultural Contestations in China and Taiwan Under Global Capitalism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008).

term member of the scene, credits Hotdog especially with inspiring the growth of a movement that encompassed the whole of the island:

> Taiwan underground rap started around 1998, and at that time southern Taiwan had Tainan-based youth group E.A.C. (East Assassin Clan), central Taiwan had T.T.M. (Top Trouble Makers), northern Taiwan had Big Circus. But strictly speaking, only one person was responsible for creating this trend, and that was MC Hotdog. Regardless of what you think of him, this historical distinction is certainly his.[64]

Indeed, as Lin points out, within a year of MC Hotdog's debut, numerous groups aspiring to similar renown emerged. Along with E.A.C. and T.T.M., Lin's first crew, known as O.G.C. (Original Gangstaz Club), coalesced at this time, along with another called D.G.B. (Da Ghetto Brothers). Gesturing toward a sense of community, most groups from this period assumed three-word English monikers evoking a hardcore American hip-hop ethos, which they rendered as acronyms following a practice that Lin has self-deprecatingly called "the legend of the three English letters" (*sange yingwen zimu chuanqi* 三個英文字母傳奇).[65] All featured at least five members, if not more, and all developed, like MC Hotdog and Dog G, largely outside the mainstream of the music industry.

The core community that formed around Master U produced long-term members like MC Hotdog and Dog G, who continue to record new material and encourage the expansion of underground rap music and hip-hop culture on the island. In the decade since both artists first appeared, this core community has regenerated several times, giving rise first to crews like E.A.C., O.G.C., and T.T.M. and then, as those artists

[64] Lin et al., *Sanpi*, 19.

[65] Ibid., 21.

evolved into long-term members themselves, to a next generation comprising groups Da Ximen (大囍門), Tripoets, and Kou Chou Ching, as well as solo artists Soft Lipa (*Danbao* 蛋堡), Manchuker (*Manren* 滿人), and Chang Jui-chuan, among others. These artists—whose work I explore in subsequent parts of this dissertation—invoke and negotiate hip-hop aesthetics and values in diverse ways, rapping in at least six different languages, sampling from heterogeneous musical sources, and exploring a vast array of narrative themes in their songs.

Beyond the rap scene, hip-hop gestures also maintain a discernible presence in mainstream music in Taiwan. In 2001, after several years in the United States building a successful tech startup, LA Boyz rapper Jeff Huang returned to the island and re-entered the music industry. Together with business associate Bobby Sheng and Korean-American hip-hop and R&B artist Jae Chong, he founded MACHI Entertainment Group.[66] Although not a hip-hop label per se, MACHI has nevertheless represented numerous high-profile pop artists in Taiwan who are identified with a hip-hop aesthetic, including megastars Jay Chou (*Zhou Jielun* 周杰倫) and Van Ness Wu (*Wu Jianhao* 吳建豪). Moreover, MACHI is also home to the Machi Crew (*Maji* 麻吉), a rap group composed of nearly a dozen performers that Huang founded in 2003. One of the only hip-hop acts on the island with major label support, they have released several number one singles and even collaborated in 2006 with American hip-hop star Missy Elliot on "Jump, Work It!!!" which remixed her song "Work It" with an updated version of the LA Boyz hit "Jump." Diverging from the majority of mainstream acts in Taiwan, Machi is also notable for its engagement with social and political issues and its preference for the

[66] Machi Entertainment's official Web site, http://www.machi.cc.

Hoklo language. Although the group's personnel, for the most part, move in a different circle than the underground performers I interviewed for this study, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge Machi's contribution to the popularization of hip-hop culture on the island.

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In this narrative, I have provided a sketch of the history of hip-hop cultural practice in Taiwan, identifying the pathways by which hip-hop traveled to the island from the United States, revealing the various sociopolitical conditions that shaped its early reception and dissemination, and tracing aspects of its transformation and localization. To review, the dawn of the global hip-hop phenomenon collided with the twilight of martial law in Taiwan. Because the government held a monopoly over broadcast media until 1993, fledgling hip-hop music and dance fans were required to expend significant time, money, and energy to secure access to sound recordings and visual media. Although discos had been forbidden under martial law, dance was quicker to find an audience among Taiwan's youth than rap, in large part because it was feasible to practice dance in public spaces. Indeed, it was a flourishing street dance scene that provided the impetus for the initial foray into locally produced hip-hop music in the early 1990s. Both the LA Boyz and The Party got their start participating in television dance competitions and thereafter reinvented themselves—to great commercial success—as rappers. Zhu Yuexin's career as Jutoupi emerged from his attempts to write material for the latter group, which producers deemed too idiosyncratic and unsuitable to their pop-oriented sound. He ultimately performed and recorded this music himself, and the resulting *Funny Rap* series made waves in its own right. A vibrant underground hip-hop scene

materialized later by way of organizations like Doobiest and Master U, which united fans from urban areas all over the island and nurtured the development of what Morgan has called core and long-term members. Dog G and MC Hotdog, regarded as Taiwan's first bona fide MCs in the hip-hop tradition, emerged from these communities. In the years since their respective debuts, an island-wide, hip-hop-oriented rap scene has grown and flourished, largely independent of the commercial music industry.

UNFOLDING THE HISTORY OF *RAOSHE*

Although casting rap in terms of *xiha* invites consideration of Taiwan's location in the global circulation of hip-hop culture, the notion of rap as *raoshe*—a musical technique present in but prior to hip-hop cultural practice—opens onto an adjacent history. Artists identified with the island's rock, pop, and folk scenes have since the mid-1980s employed rap vocal techniques in their compositions without direct recourse to hip-hop aesthetics and without claiming membership in a hip-hop community. Their performances reflect a broader syncretic impulse in Taiwan's popular music industry, which has from its inception embraced the borrowing and refashioning of musical ideas from other places. In this narrative, I propose that we consider the history of rap in light of Taiwan's abiding adventures in musical hybridity. Thinking about rap in this way—that is, largely unmoored from its strict associations with hip-hop—is critical to gaining awareness of the diverse meanings that have been assigned to rap performance over the years, and to developing a comprehensive view of its lineage in Taiwan in the context of a broader musical culture deeply influenced by a complex history of colonial encounter. I begin by providing a rough sketch of the island's music industry, focusing on the development of two genres—Hoklo popular songs and Mandopop—that typify the hybrid

processes at work in Taiwan's popular music cultural practice. I then introduce the work of several musicians identified with the island's folk, rock, and pop scenes who have incorporated rap vocal techniques into their performances as an adjunct to other musical styles.

The Development of Taiwan's Popular Music Industry

Scholars trace the emergence of the popular music industry in Taiwan generally to the Japanese colonial period and specifically to the release of the 1932 song "Weeping Peach Blossoms" [*Thô-hue khik hiat kì* 桃花泣血記] by lyricist Zhan Tianma (詹天馬) and composer Wang Yunfeng (王雲峯).[67] The Hoklo-language theme to a silent film from Shanghai, it was recorded in Tokyo by Taiwanese performers and quickly found favor on the streets of Taipei (then known as Taihoku). As violinist Huang Shih-Ting suggests in her dissertation on early Hoklo popular music, the song bears sonic traces of its transnational, transcultural genesis: "The style of ["Weeping Peach Blossoms"] was different than other earlier vocal genres of local dramas, and it utilized a Western band orchestration underlying a distinctly singable melody."[68] Indeed, the song's marriage of pentatonic vocal line and diatonic accompaniment was in step with developments in the urban popular music scenes of China and Japan, where voguish genres like *shidaiqu* (時代曲) and *enka* (演歌) fused eastern and western musical idioms to tremendous commercial success.

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[67] For one example, see Lü Yuxiu 呂鈺秀, *Taiwan yinyue shi* 台灣音樂史 [Taiwan music history] (Taipei: Wunan, 2003), 132-134.

[68] Huang Shih-Ting, "Fulao Popular Songs During the Japanese Colonization of Taiwan" (DMA dissertation, University of Houston, 2006), 16.

The Hoklo popular song business thrived until 1937, when Japan entered into war with China and the Japanese colonial government banned the use of Sinitic languages, including Hoklo and Hakka. During this period, a number of Hoklo songs were translated into Japanese and appropriated by colonial authorities for military propaganda.[69] The island's cultural industries would be subject to the vicissitudes of politics for decades to come; the end of the Second World War heralded Taiwan's turnover to China, and Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist government imposed its own restrictions on the language, lyrical content, and musical ethos of popular songs. As Nancy Guy has noted, the post-turnover period "witnessed a further decline in the production of Taiwanese popular music. The postwar economic downturn, coupled with the Nationalists' efforts to restrict and disparage local Taiwanese culture, drove many talented artists away from creative endeavors."[70] In a reversal of previous circumstances, by the 1950s Taiwanese musicians had begun adapting Japanese tunes and translating them into Hoklo for the local market, giving rise to what some scholars have referred to as "songs of mixed blood" (*hunxue gequ* 混血歌曲).[71] Even as broadcast laws limited the number of non-Mandarin songs that could be broadcast on television and radio in a given day, artists continued to produce these songs which, in their clear derivation from

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[69] Nancy Guy, "Feeling a Shared History through Song: 'A Flower in the Rainy Night' as a Key Cultural Symbol in Taiwan," *TDR: The Drama Review* 52, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 69. For additional discussion regarding Taiwan's popular music industry during the Second Sino-Japanese War, see Zhuang Yongming 莊永明, *1930 Niandai jueban taiyu liuxing* ge 1930 年代絕版台語流行歌 [Out-of-print Hoklo popular songs of the 1930s] (Taipei: Taibeishi zhengfu wenhua ju, 2009), 30-32.

[70] Guy, "Syncretic Traditions."

[71] Sylvia Li-chun Lin cites Zhuang Yongming's use of this term in "Toward a New Identity: Nativism and Popular Music in Taiwan," *China* Information 17, no. 2 (2003): 88.

enka, bore the deep sonic imprint of the Japanese presence on Taiwan.

"Mixture" is a quality that has consistently defined the island's popular music in the years since, as local sounds have continuously converged and combined with musics imported from Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Tokyo, as well as from Paris, New York, London, and Havana. The 1.5 million mainland refugees who accompanied the Republic of China's decampment to Taiwan at the end of the 1940s brought with them a predilection for *shidaiqu*, Mandarin-language pop songs that originated in the cosmopolitan Shanghai of the 1920s.[72] The style quickly established a foothold on the island, fostered by a political environment that restricted local Taiwanese cultural expression. As suggested above, the form was already thoroughly hybrid when it arrived on Taiwanese shores, an amalgam of styles that featured "the blue notes of jazz and the Western scale interwoven with pentatonic strains and folk tunes," and arrangements "marked by the strong pulsation of tango, rumba and foxtrot and the string-dominated sounds of the Hollywood-Broadway tradition…as well as simple chordal harmony or regular beats delivered by a couple of Chinese fiddles and percussion."[73] Both Taiwan and Hong Kong, which also absorbed numerous mainland refugees following the war, would become centers of *shidaiqu* production and consumption until the genre fell out of fashion towards the end of the 1960s.

It is worth noting that waning interest in *shidaiqu* coincided not only with the graying of the first-generation mainland émigré population in Taiwan, but also with a

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[72] For an excellent, though brief, discussion of *shidaiqu* production and consumption in Taiwan, see Wong Kee Chee, *The Age of Shanghainese Pops* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2001), 226-231.

[73] Chen Szu-wei, "The Rise and Generic Features of Shanghai Popular Songs in the 1930s and 1940s," *Popular Music* 24, no. 1 (Jan 2005): 107-125.

deepening American cultural presence on the island. The years between 1957 and 1979 saw a significant infusion of western popular music into the local soundscape via the Armed Forces Network Taiwan (AFNT), an officially sanctioned English-language radio station operated by the American military. AFNT played classical music, jazz, and the hits of the day, from Elvis Presley to Sammy Davis, Jr. Its primary mandate was to serve the American military community, but AFNT also did the ancillary work of promoting a positive image of American cultural ideals to locals.[74] When the U.S. withdrew forces from the island in 1979, the American Chamber of Commerce and local community and business leaders successfully lobbied President Chiang Ching-kuo to keep the station on-air. After this time AFNT started a new life as ICRT: International Community Radio Taipei, operated by the Taiwan government and overseen by a Board of Trustees of mixed American and Taiwanese representation.[75] In its incarnation as ICRT, the station aspired explicitly to serve "the foreign community in Taiwan and [forge] a cultural link between the Chinese population of Taiwan and the English-speaking residents of the island."[76]

The listening environment on the island normalized the intermingling of the aforementioned musical styles, and we might posit the genre known as Mandopop, which

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[74] For a complete history of AFNT/ICRT, see Allen Chun, "Nomadic Ethnoscapes in the Changing Global-Local Pop Music Industry: ICRT as IC," in *Popular Culture in Taiwan: Charismatic Modernity*, ed. Marc L. Moskowitz (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 86-104.

[75] Ibid., 89.

[76] "About ICRT," International Community Radio Taipei, http://www.icrt.com.tw/about_icrt.php?pageOneId=1&pageTwoId=1&poId=11&ptId=35 (accessed 15 August 2011).

emerged in Taiwan in the late 1960s, as their synthesis.[77] Teresa Teng (*Deng Lijun* 鄧麗君), Mandopop's most notable luminary, was famously versatile: she performed confidently in multiple languages and seamlessly merged *shidaiqu*, *enka*, and western pop stylings in dozens of hit records from 1970 until her death in 1995. Mandopop continues to demonstrate a significant degree of stylistic diversity today. Pertinent to this dissertation's focus on rap music, artists like David Tao (*Tao Zhe* 陶喆) introduced rhythm and blues-inflected Mandopop to Chinese-speaking audiences in the mid-1990s. His soulful performances of Hoklo popular songs from the 1930s, including "Awaiting the Spring Breeze" [*Bāng tshun-hong* 望春風],[78] and 1940s *shidaiqu* like "Fragrance of the Night" (*Ye laixiang* 夜來香)[79] anticipated Mandopop's later embrace of African American popular idioms. Jay Chou, whose songs evince the influence of African American music, has experimented additionally with both country-western ("Cowboy on the Run" *Niuzai hen mang* 牛仔很忙)[80] and various traditional Chinese styles ("Blue and

[77] I use the English term Mandopop (a portmanteau of "Mandarin" and "pop") in this dissertation to describe Mandarin-language popular music, distinct from *shidaiqu*, that emerged in the late 1960s. In Taiwan, however, the terms *huayu liuxing gequ* 華語流行歌曲 [Chinese-language popular songs] and *guoyu liuxing gequ* 國語流行歌曲 [popular songs in the national language] are typically used instead. These do not necessarily imply a distinction from *shidaiqu*.

[78] David Tao 陶喆, cover performance of "Bāng tshun-hong" 望春風 [Awaiting the spring breeze], by Teng Yu-hsin 鄧雨賢 (music) and Li Lin-chiu 李臨秋 (lyrics), *Tao Zhe* 陶喆 [David Tao], Shock Records, 1997, compact disc.

[79] David Tao 陶喆, cover performance of "Ye laixiang" 夜來香 [Fragrance of the night], by Li Jinguang 黎錦光, *I'm OK*, Shock Records, 1999, compact disc.

[80] Jay Chou 周杰倫, "Niuzai hen mang" 牛仔很忙 [Cowboy on the run], *Wo hen mang* 我很忙 [On the run], Sony Music, 2007, compact disc.

White Porcelain" *Qing huaci* 青花瓷).[81]

Pop Artists and Early Forays into *Raoshe*

Given Mandopop's high tolerance for musical mixture, it is unsurprising that the first commercial rap song in Taiwan, "Yes, Sir!" (*Baogao banzhang* 報告班長), was recorded by Mandopop star Harlem Yu (*Yu Chengqing* 庾澄慶).[82] Released in June of 1987, just a month before the official cessation of martial law and five years before the LA Boyz made their debut, it was the eponymous theme to a martial film (*junjiaopian* 軍教片) about draftees coming of age in the ROC's standing army. The song's lyrics recount with mixed senses of nostalgia and vexation the trials and tribulations associated with being a new recruit. "Yes, Sir!" exploits similarities between the speech-song qualities of both American rap music and the characteristic sounds of military drill commands as it playfully extolls the virtues of teamwork and patriotism:

看我們的隊伍 雄壯威武
聽我們的歌聲 響徹雲霄
看我們的國旗 迎風飄揚
答數 一二三四

see our battalion, mighty and majestic
hear our song resounding
see our nation's flag, fluttering in the wind
count off, 1—2—3—4

Although the song itself advances no specific political agenda, its distinctly uncritical

[81] Jay Chou 周杰倫, "Qing huaci" 青花瓷 [Blue and white porcelain], *Wo hen mang* 我很忙 [On the run], Sony Music, 2007, compact disc.

[82] Harlem Yu 庾澄慶, "Baogao banzhang" 報告班長 [Yes, sir!], *Baogao banzhang* 報告班長 [Yes, sir!], Linfair Records, 1987, cassette tape.

lyrics were intended to induce a sense of nostalgia among listeners who had themselves completed compulsory military service.[83] A pop singer by trade, Yu had never rapped prior to writing and recording the song and in fact considered it a bold attempt at integrating a new "way of singing" (*changfa* 唱法) into an otherwise standard Mandarin-language rock ditty.[84] Yu is typically credited with being the first to use the term *raoshe* and has often introduced the song in live performances as "the first Chinese-language *raoshe* song!" ("第一個中文饒舌歌!").[85] Apart from the chanted, rhymed lyrics, however, it is important to note that "Yes, Sir!" lacks any of the hallmarks of hip-hop—Yu's voice is accompanied by a rock band rather than a DJ; there are no audible traces of funk, soul, dub, or disco; and Yu makes no lyrical references to hip-hop cultural practice. "Yes, Sir!" was well-received by audiences and remains a fan favorite, but Yu's flirtations with the vocal technique were short-lived—he returned to singing exclusively on subsequent albums.

The lifting of martial law in July 1987 brought to an end 37 years of Nationalist hegemony and ushered in both a consolidation of democratic processes and restoration of many previously suspended civil rights. This political seismic shift was of great import

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[83] The ROC maintained a policy of mandatory military service for males between the ages of 18 and 36 from approximately 1951 to 2012. See Yu-han Chu and Jih-wen Lin, "Political Development in 20th-Century Taiwan: State-Building, Regime Transformation and the Construction of National Identity," *The China Quarterly* 165 (Mar., 2001): 118. In recent times, the standard two-year period of conscription has gradually been reduced and new forms of "alternative service" have been introduced. From 2015, the Ministry of the Interior will shift to an all-volunteer army.

[84] Harlem Yu, "Yinyan" 引言 [Introduction], Liner Notes, *Baogao banzhang* 報告班長 [Yes, sir!].

[85] For an example of one such performance see Harlem Yu, *Ha Century Live Show*, Sony Music Taiwan, 2002, VCD.

to artists as it initiated the dismantling of policies that had long restricted local cultural and linguistic practices. Indeed, music had been subject to stringent government controls throughout the period of martial law; between 1949 and 1987, more than a thousand songs were censored by government agencies for a wide variety of reasons, including expressing left-leaning sentiments (*yishi zuoqing* 意識左傾) or bitterness and grief (*youyuan aishang* 幽怨哀傷).[86] Hoklo-language music was especially vulnerable to censorship as the KMT strenuously promoted the superiority of mainland culture, sought to eradicate lingering signs of Japanese influence, and enforced a strict policy of monolingualism. The more liberal environment following the end of martial law galvanized artists for the first time in decades to engage political themes in their work, write lyrics in previously suppressed languages, and rehabilitate and re-imagine local cultural forms.

The Hoklo-language popular music that emerged in the immediate post-martial law period departed dramatically from what had come before. Musicians identified with the so-called New Taiwanese Song Movement (*xin taiyuge yundong* 新台語歌運動) rebelled "against forty years of Mandarin hegemony in Taiwanese popular musical production, and at the same time [distanced] themselves from the undeniably strong

[86] *Taiwan yinyue baike cishu* 台灣音樂百科辭書 [Encyclopedia of Taiwan Music], ed. Chen Yuxiu 陳郁秀 (Taipei: Yuan-Liou Publishing Company, 2008), s.v. "jinge" 禁歌 [forbidden songs]. For additional information regarding censorship in the martial law period, see Lin Ching-yi 林靜怡, "Guozhi shiqi chajin gequ falü guanzhi tixi zhi tantao" 國治時期查禁歌曲法律管制體系之探討 [The lawful restrictions for the forbidden songs under the KMT domination] (master's thesis, National Taiwan University, 2010).

influence of Japanese *enka* on local Taiwanese folksong."[87] Whereas Mandopop was primarily concerned with romantic love and Hoklo songs since the 1950s had focused on the "lives and loves of the working class and the underworld,"[88] musicians working under the rubric of New Taiwanese Song cultivated a critical acumen with regard to politics, history, and local cultural practice. In developing what they felt would be a distinctly local sound, however, they did not gird themselves against the foreign or the modern. On the contrary, as literature scholar Liao Ping-hui has argued, culture-producers in the post-martial law period responded to their "double marginalization" from "the periphery of China to the margins of the world" by becoming "strongly desirous of transnational codes and technologies" that signified participation in the global order.[89] Remixing the past rather than breaking from it entirely, participants in New Taiwanese Song merged rap, rock, new wave, and traditional Taiwanese song forms. The product was a dual exercise in musical cosmopolitanism and local cultural revival that spoke powerfully to post-martial law desires for a Taiwan-centered musical (post)modernity.

Rap manifested as a particularly powerful resource for creative experimentation in the New Taiwanese Songs of Blacklist Workshop, a collective of musicians comprising Wang Minghui (王明輝), Chen Zhuhui (陳主惠), Chen Ming-chang (*Chen Mingzhang* 陳明章), American Keith Stuart (司徒松), and several others. The group's name—a direct reference to surveillance measures carried out during martial law that could land

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[87] Andrew F. Jones, "Blacklist Studio," in *The Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture*, ed. Edward Lawrence Davis (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 61.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ping-Hui Liao, "Postmodern Literary Discourse and Contemporary Public Culture in Taiwan," *boundary 2* 24, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 57, 58.

one on the "blacklist" of government enemies—was a provocation in itself, a declaration of design to speak the previously unspeakable. To this point, the nine tracks on Blacklist's watershed 1989 album *Songs of Madness* gave voice to lower middle-class protestations against social injustice.[90] The group was exceptionally bold in its choice of lyrical themes in songs like "Imperial Taipei" (*Taibei diguo* 台北帝國) and "Taxi" (*Jichengche* 計程車), providing "epic and politically pointed testimony to the tribulations of modern Taiwanese history, confronting issues as diverse as Japanese and US colonialism, KMT repression, and the decidedly mixed blessings of the island's breakneck economic development, all through a defiantly local lens."[91] Several years before Jutoupi's *Funny Rap* series took up the theme of insanity, *Songs of Madness* deployed rap as a musical technique to sound a society in the midst of chaotic metamorphosis: multiple voices performed in multiple languages and invoked multiple musical traditions as they clamored for recognition.

One of four rap tracks on the album, "Democracy Bumpkin" (*Minzhu acao* 民主阿草) claims the distinction of having been among the last songs banned by Taiwan's broadcast media.[92] Opening with the sound of a military band playing an out-of-tune rendition of the Republic of China's national anthem, the piece follows a group of young farmers who come from the countryside to indulge in the urbane luxuries of Taipei City, only to run aground of a political protest. They profess no interest in politics and beseech

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[90] Blacklist Workshop 黑名單工作室, *Zhuakuang ge* 抓狂歌 [Songs of madness], Rock Records, 1989, compact disc.

[91] Jones, "Blacklist," 61.

[92] *Yinyue baike*, s.v. "Heimingdan gongzuoshi" 黑名單工作室 [Blacklist Workshop].

a policeman to let them pass, in the process observing the activities of a pro-democracy agitator standing nearby:

人伊要來抗議那個老法統
老法統唉呀無天理
霸佔國會變把戲
歸陣閒閒在吃死米
有的嘛老搆強未喘氣
咱政府驚伊呀擋不著
咱的稅金乎伊拿去吊點滴
全世界攏在笑伊未見笑

He wants to protest against the old political system
The old political system is truly unreasonable
Occupying the Congress playing tricks
A whole group of them idle just wasting rice
Some are now so old they can hardly breathe
Our government fears they can't live forever
So they take taxpayers' money to pay for IV injections
The outside world is laughing at their shamelessness…[93]

The lyrics in this excerpt refer to the seemingly endless tenures of KMT officials who fled to Taiwan following the war and clung to hopes of "recapturing the mainland" well into the 1980s.[94] Their abiding presence in the government ensured the entrenchment of KMT political interests, even as Taiwan inched toward a consolidated democratic system with greater Hoklo and Hakka representation.[95] As the song reaches its conclusion, the

[93] Blacklist Workshop 黑名單工作室, "Minzhu acao" 民主阿草 [Democracy bumpkin], *Zhuakuang ge* 抓狂歌 [Songs of madness], Rock Records, 1989, compact disc. I borrow Sylvia Li-chun Lin's excellent translation of these lyrics in "Toward a New Identity," 91-92.

[94] Lin, "Toward a New Identity," 90-91.

[95] For more on the domination of the Legislative Yuan and National Assembly by legislators elected in 1940s China, see Cal Clark and Alexander C. Tan, *Taiwan's Political Economy: Meeting Challenges, Pursuing Progress* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012), 113-115.

national anthem returns, this time interwoven with the "Walkürenritt" leitmotif from Wagner's *Die Walküre.* The union of the two strains is deliciously derisive, suggesting the presence of a wide chasm between the KMT's heroic self-image and its actual decrepitude. Songs like "Democracy Bumpkin" demonstrated Blacklist Workshop's commitment to opposition politics at the end of the 1980s, and their adoption of rap magnified the subversiveness of their message. By privileging lyric over melody, rap provided a means of foregrounding the group's extensive use of Hoklo, the suppressed language of Taiwan's disenfranchised majority. Moreover, rap allowed the group to embrace the tonemic contours of the Hoklo language and to deliver their powerfully critical lyrics in a way that emphasized semantic comprehensibility over conformity to a superimposed melody.[96]

In the liner notes to *Songs of Madness*, Blacklist Workshop includes a section written whimsically in the style of pharmaceutical instructions, suggesting that their work be received as an antidote to a kind of politics-induced affliction. They write that "this album uses western rap and rock genres, and is refined and ground with local specialty culture to help improve blood flow and reduce inflammation and toxicity."[97] This combination of musical styles, they suggest, can help cure those who suffer from excessive nostalgia (*huaijiu* 懷舊) for Taiwan's past, stubborn attachment (*zhizuo* 執著)

[96] Correct tonal articulation is critical to comprehension of Hoklo, a tonal, Sinitic language. Linguistic ambiguity can arise when the contours of musical melody contradict correct tonal articulation, as occurs in the vast majority of western-influenced popular genres. With vocalization more towards the speech end of the speech-song continuum, however, rap permits its performers to preserve tonal contour. I will discuss issues related to musicking in tonal languages later in Part One and again in Part Three.

[97] Blacklist Workshop, *Zhuakuang ge*.

to notions of local culture, apathy (*lenggan* 冷感) towards social issues, and depression (*yuzu* 鬱卒) induced by not being able to speak one's mind.[98] Unlike the artists discussed in the first section of this chapter, who understand rap in terms of a hip-hop ethos and as a self-sufficient enterprise, Blacklist Workshop clearly envisioned rap as part of the larger project of creating a stylistically diverse New Taiwanese Song.

Beyond Blacklist Workshop, other singer-songwriters associated with New Taiwanese Song—including Lim Giong [*Lîm Kîong* 林強] and Jutoupi—have also incorporated rap into their musical arsenal. Although Lim is known primarily as a folk rock musician, his 1992 song "Bullets at Hot Spring Village" [*Un-tsuânn hiong ê tshìng-tsí* 溫泉鄉的槍子] about a grisly mafia murder in Taipei's Beitou (北投) district, employs a rapping vocal style to deliver an intricate story in the local vernacular.[99] Jutoupi, whose work I discussed extensively in the previous narrative, began his career as a folk singer but achieved notoriety through his three *Funny Rap* albums. It is interesting to note that Mi Chonghua, who discovered and produced the LA Boyz and The Party as well as Jutoupi, also participated in the genesis of New Taiwanese Song. Prior to his tenure as General Manager of MTV Taiwan, he ran the independent label Mandala Works (*Zhenyanshe* 真言社), on which all the aforementioned albums were released. Although I have gone to great lengths to parse the history of rap into separate *xiha* and *raoshe* narratives—the former privileging Taiwan's place in the global circulation of hip-

[98] Ibid.

[99] Lim Giong 林強, "Un-tsuânn hiong ê tshìng-tsí" 溫泉鄉的槍子 [Bullets at hot spring village], *Chunfeng shaonian xiong* 春風少年兄 [Spring breeze young brother], Rock Records, 1992, compact disc.

hop, and the latter acknowledging a more general hybrid impulse in Taiwan's popular music—Mi Chonghua's presence in both strands suggests that they intersected in the early 1990s at the level of production and distribution.

Since the late 1990s, Taiwanese and Taiwanese-American Mandopop artists such as Jay Chou and Wang Leehom (*Wang Lihong* 王力宏), respectively, have continued to perform hip-hop-flavored rap as an adjunct to other styles in their work; indeed, I propose that their music might better be called "Mandohop" to acknowledge its deep debt to hip-hop aesthetics. Chou, currently the world's most popular Mandopop artist,[100] frequently fuses rap with traditional Chinese, rock, pop, and R&B sounds, as in hits like "The Herbalist's Manual" (*Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目),[101] "Red Imitation" (*Hong mofang* 紅模仿),[102] and "Checkmate" (*Jiangjun* 將軍).[103] Wang is similarly versatile in his approach to Mandopop. While the majority of his songs follow David Tao in their invocation of R&B, Wang first began incorporating rap into his music in the late 1990s. His 2000 album *Forever's First Day* (*Yongyuande diyitian* 永遠的第一天) includes a version of the 1978 song "Descendants of the Dragon" (*Longde chuanren* 龍的傳人), to which

[100] Although many of the artists I discuss in this section of the chapter produce their music in collaboration with other songwriters and lyricists, Jay Chou's longtime creative partner Fang Wenshan (方文山) is among the few with brand-name recognition. Fang has written the lyrics to nearly all of Chou's songs since 2000 and is now a celebrity in his own right.

[101] Jay Chou 周杰倫, "Bencao gangmu" 本草綱目 [The herbalist's manual], *Yiran fantexi* 依然范特西 [Still fantasy], Sony Music, 2006, compact disc.

[102] Jay Chou 周杰倫, "Hong mofang" 紅模仿 [Red imitation], *Yiran fantexi* 依然范特西 [Still fantasy], Sony Music, 2006, compact disc.

[103] Jay Chou 周杰倫, "Jiangjun" 將軍 [Checkmate], *Qi li xiang* 七里香 [Common jasmine orange], Sony Music, 2004, compact disc.

Wang added an English-language rap bridge about a couple who emigrates to the United States in search of greater educational and economic opportunities:

Now here's a story that'll make U cry
Straight from Taiwan they came
Just a girl and a homeboy in love
No money, no job, no speak no English
Nobody gonna give 'em the time of day
In a city so cold they made a wish
And then they had the strength to graduate with honors
And borrowed 50 just to consummate a marriage
Under GOD who never left their side
Gave their children pride
Raise your voices high love will never die, never die![104]

Since recording "Descendants of the Dragon," Wang has frequently made recourse to rap in songs exploring the cultural dynamics of Chinese/Taiwanese identity. In the liner notes to his 2004 album *Shangri-La* (*Xinzhongde riyue* 心中的日月), he unveiled his so-called "chinked-out" style, which "repossesses the word [chink]" to describe "a sound that is international, and at the same time, Chinese."[105] According to Wang, *Shangri-La* drew on "China's most precious and untapped resources, the musics of its 'shao shu min zu,' or ethnic minorities" to create "an R&B/hip-hop album that…the whole world can identify as being Chinese."[106] Songs like "Heroes of Earth" (*Gaishi yingxiong* 蓋世英

[104] Wang Leehom 王力宏, "Longde chuanren" 龍的傳人 [Descendants of the dragon], *Yongyuande diyitian* 永遠的第一天 [Forever's first day], Sony Music, 2000, compact disc. Lyrics are formatted as they appear widely online. The 1978 song "Descendants of the Dragon," from which Wang's version is adapted, was written by singer-songwriter Hou Dejian 候德健 but actually recorded and made famous by Wang Leehom's older cousin (*biaozhi* 表姪), singer Li Jianfu 李建复. Both Hou and Li were central figures in Taiwan's Campus Folk Movement, which I discuss later in Part One.

[105] Wang Leehom 王力宏, Liner Notes, *Xinzhongde riyue* 心中的日月 [Shangri-la], Sony BMG, 2004, compact disc.

[106] Ibid.

雄)[107] and "Beside the Plum Blossoms" (*Zai meibian* 在梅邊)[108] are intensely hybrid operations, in which Wang marries rap vocals with Mandopop production and merges them with guest performances by Peking and Kun opera actors.

* * *

In this narrative I have explored the history of *raoshe* vis-à-vis a broader syncretic impulse in Taiwan's popular music and revealed the presence of rap as a musical technique in songs by artists associated with the island's rock, folk, and pop scenes. I began this account in the 1930s, during the halcyon days of Taiwan's commercial music industry under Japanese colonial rule. Tracing a predilection for hybrid sounds through the rise of Hoklo popular song and *shidaiqu*, I discussed rap's emergence in the 1987 track "Yes, Sir!" by Mandopop star Harlem Yu and its subsequent appearances in the immediate post-martial law period in music by artists associated with the New Taiwanese Song Movement, including Blacklist Workshop, Lim Giong, and Jutoupi. I concluded with a brief examination of rap's ubiquity in the work of Jay Chou and Wang Leehom, both of whom are primarily associated with the Mandopop genre. Defining *rap* purely in terms of a globally circulating hip-hop culture and *rappers* as artists who are committed exclusively to the performance of rap music conceals the diversity of performers in Taiwan to whom rap has been, and continues to be, deeply meaningful. Exploring how musicians outside the hip-hop community have deployed rap in their music provides essential context for understanding rap's lineage in Taiwan as part of a broader popular

[107] Wang Leehom 王力宏 ft. MC Jin, "Gaishi yingxiong" 蓋世英雄 [Heroes of the earth], *Gaishi yingxiong* 蓋世英雄 [Heroes of the earth], Sony Music, 2005, compact disc.

[108] Wang Leehom 王力宏, "Zai meibian" 在梅邊 [Beside the plum blossoms], *Gaishi yingxiong* 蓋世英雄 [Heroes of the earth], Sony Music, 2005, compact disc.

musical culture that enriches and enlivens its production.

UNFOLDING THE HISTORY OF *LIĀM-KUA*

In this final section, I consider the development of rap music in Taiwan as intertwined with the longer history of local *liām-kua*—or "song reading"—traditions. Departing from my approach in the previous two narratives, I advance a view of rap here as not intrinsically foreign but familiar to Taiwanese performers and audiences who understand *liām-kua* as a grassroots project in which rappers now participate. In a sense, this is the most speculative of the three histories I outline; it insinuates considerable flexibility about what constitutes *liām-kua*, traditionally understood as a mode of performance that follows specific musical conventions and addresses recognizable topoi. And yet the notion of rap music as somehow connected to, if not emergent from, *liām-kua* surfaced time and again in my interviews, as many performers referred to storytelling as a philosophical imperative driving their performance, and to *liām-kua* as a critical cultural touchstone guiding their storytelling. Following from this, I do not propose that we understand rap as isomorphic with *liām-kua*, but rather as a practice in dialogue with already existing local musical narrative practices, broadly defined. I will begin by providing a general overview of the history of *liām-kua* and related musical storytelling practices in Taiwan, and then consider the work of several rap artists who have described their music as an extension of these practices.

* * *

Before proceeding to the specific, it is useful to begin with the general: *liām-kua* is a member of the *shuochang* (說唱) family of traditional Chinese musical narrative performance genres, so-named for their variable integration of speaking (說) and singing

(唱) techniques. It finds its roots in a style of *shuochang* called *jinge* (錦歌), which traveled to Taiwan during the Ming and Qing dynasties with Han migrants from Fujian and Guangdong provinces, but acquired unique characteristics over the course of several centuries on the island.[109] Until about 1960, *liām-kua* flourished as a form of popular entertainment for members of Taiwan's largely agrarian society. In urban and rural settings alike, it was performed by beggars, itinerant blind musicians, and traveling medicine sellers to rapt audiences hungry for amusements to fill the quiet evening hours. Before the advent of mass media, these presentations served not only as pleasant distractions from the responsibilities of work and family life, but also as technologies for the dissemination of information and the teaching of morals and ethics. Today, *liām-kua* is considered a masterpiece of intangible cultural heritage and Taiwan's most representative *shuochang* art, to the extent that the term has become synonymous with musical narrative in general on the island.

Liām-kua is typically performed by a soloist who accompanies him or herself on an instrument, more often than not the two-stringed, plucked "moon lute," or *yueqin* (月琴). Supplemental performers may also be present in some cases, thickening the musical texture with the bowed lute *da guangxian* (大廣弦) or the dulcimer-like *yangqin* (揚琴).[110] Following the imperative of *shuochang* genres to tell a tale, musicians are tasked with balancing "a semantically intelligible linguistic communication of the storyline

[109] *Yinyue baike*, s.v. "liām-kua" 唸歌 [song reading].

[110] Yang Hsiu-ching (*Yang Xiuqing* 楊秀卿), a blind *yueqin* player and perhaps the most famous living performer of *liām-kua*, often takes the stage with her husband, who accompanies her on *da guangxian*.

(according to the tonal requirements of the language) with the aesthetic needs of the delivery style in the act of performance."[111] To this end, narrative is conveyed almost entirely through sound; diverging from operatic performances, *liām-kua* artists remain seated, do not wear costumes, and do not gesture physically. Vocal melodies are derived from a limited number of tune types—for example, the "Seven-Character Tune" [*tshit-ji-tiāu* 七字調], "River and Lake Tune" [*kang-oô-tiāu* 江湖調], and "Duma Tune" [*to-má-tiāu* 都馬調]—the contours of which bend and flex to accommodate the tones of Hoklo. Structure materializes from a requirement that each phrase of a *liām-kua* performance consist of seven characters and each verse consist of four phrases; apart from the first phrase, the third phrase must conclude with falling or low tones and the other two phrases with rising or high, level tones. The most celebrated *liām-kua* performers are virtuosic in their abilities to create, even through improvisation, within these constraints.

The subjects of *liām-kua* narratives tend to fall into one of three main categories: 1) songs of exhortation and enlightenment (*quanshi jiaohuaxingde* 勸世教化性的), 2) tales and fables (*gushixingde* 故事性的), and 3) other (*qita* 其他).[112] The first category encompasses songs intended to persuade audience members—standing metonymically for a larger society—to behave as responsible, ethical individuals. Examples include "Exhortation to Quit Gambling Song" [*Khǹg kài pu̍ah-kiáu kua* 勸戒賭博歌], "Exhortation to Quit Prostitution Song" [*Khǹg siàn kài îm kua* 勸善戒淫歌], and

[111] Francesca R. Sborgi Lawson, *The Narrative Arts of Tianjin: Between Music and Language* (Farnham, U.K.: Ashgate Publishing Limites, 2011), 7-8.

[112] *Yinyue baike*, s.v. "liām-kua" 唸歌 [song reading].

"Exhortation to Quit Drinking Song" [*Khǹg kài chiú kua* 勸戒酒歌]. The second category encompasses folk tales, local color stories, and historical stories about both China and Taiwan. Examples include "Koxinga Opens Taiwan" [*Tēⁿ-sîng-kong khui tâi-uân* 鄭成功開台灣], "Treasure Island New Taiwan" [*Pó-tó sin tâi-uân* 寶島新台灣], and "The Legend of White Snake" [*P̍ek-siâ-tuān* 白蛇傳]. The final category is something of a catch all, encompassing a wide variety of songs about weddings, products an itinerant singer might be hawking, place names, and current events. Examples of these include "Song of Flies and Mosquitoes" [*Hoô-sîn báng-á kua* 胡蠅蚊仔歌], "Song of Talking Mice" [*Niau tshí sio-kò kua* 貓鼠相告歌], and "Call and Response by a Hundred Plants" [*Pah-tsháu tùi-tap* 百草對答]. Moving between these categories sometimes in the space of a single performance, *liām-kua* artists are constituted not merely as entertainers, but as keepers of historical and folkloric knowledge, promoters of moral and ethical responsibility, and sources of information about current events.

Throughout much of the Japanese colonial period, the genre enjoyed consistent patronage on the island. Indeed, *liām-kua* performances were among the first attended to by record companies in Taiwan, predating the emergence of Hoklo popular songs by several years.[113] The genre was so fashionable, in fact, that publishers in Shanghai and Fujian ran a brisk trade in *liām-kua* song books (*gezai ce* 歌仔冊) for public consumption.[114] As part of Japan's attempts to consolidate its rule over Taiwan, however,

[113] Huang, "Fulao Songs," 15.

[114] Tsai Hsin-hsin 蔡欣欣, personal interview, 9 June 2011. For a survey of songbook types and history of the trade, see Zhou Chunyi 周純一, "Taiwan gezai zhi yinyue wenhua yanjiu" 台灣歌仔之音樂文化研究 [Research on Taiwan musical culture],

colonial authorities clamped down on both trade with the mainland and the expression of local languages and cultural forms at the end of the 1930s. Things did not improve much following the end of the war and KMT handover; while Nationalist administrators did not ban the performance of *liām-kua* outright, policies promoting Mandarin as the national tongue generally enervated the production of Hoklo culture. As the island transitioned to an industrial economy and forms of mass-mediated popular entertainment proliferated, *liām-kua* continued to recede from public awareness, sustained only through the efforts of enthusiasts and a small number of accomplished older artists. Other *shuochang* arts, such as ballad-singing from the Hengchun peninsula region in southern Taiwan [*Hîng-tshun koa-iâu* 恆春歌謠], languished similarly during that period.[115]

In spite of challenges to their survival, however, these musical narrative traditions did not vanish entirely but resurfaced instead on the concert stage. In 1966, ethnomusicologists Hsu Tsang-houei (*Xu Changhui* 許常惠) and Shih Wei-liang (*Shi Weiliang* 史惟亮) embarked on a major project to survey the full range of musics of the island, including those of Hoklo, Hakka, and indigenous peoples.[116] A year into this

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http://210.240.194.93/khng-koa-a/03n/台灣歌仔之音樂文化研究.pdf (accessed 26 November 2012), 57-59.

[115] Although their performance practices are somewhat similar, Hengchun folk songs draw from a different tune matrix than *liām-kua* and scholars consider them as distinct genres. Nevertheless, most people do not distinguish between the two in contemporary parlance, but generally refer to all local *shuochang* genres as either *shuochang, liām-kua* or *minyao* 民謠 (folk ballads). See Lü, *Taiwan yinyue shi*, 451-456 for more information on Hengchun folk songs, referred to in that text simply as *fulaoxi minge* 福佬系民歌 (Hoklo folk songs).

[116] This project was known as the Folksong Collection Movement (*minge caiji yundong* 民歌採集運動).

project, they stumbled upon Chen Da (陳達), an elderly, impoverished ballad singer from Hengchun who had been performing in that area for decades. Proclaiming him the soul of Taiwanese folk music, Hsu invited Chen to Taipei to record in 1971 and again in 1977, as well as to perform in a number of landmark concerts. The results of this collaboration—among them the albums *Folk Musician Chen Da and His Songs* (*Minzu yueshou Chen Da he tade ge* 民族樂手陳達和他的歌)[117] and *Chen Da and Hengchun Tune Shuochang* (*Chen Da yu Hengchun diao shuochang* 陳達與恆純調說唱)[118]—were highly influential to young nativist intellectuals steeped at the time in debates about Taiwan consciousness and its implications for the future of musical and literary culture on the island.[119]

Many of these intellectuals were participants in the Campus Folk Song Movement (*xiaoyuan minge yundong* 校園民歌運動), which emerged in the mid-1970s as a response to a widely perceived sense of American cultural imperialism on the island. In brief, the movement encompassed a heterogeneous assortment of artists working to reclaim domestic popular music from the totalizing influence of both foreign and commercial interests. Musicians Yang Xian (楊弦), Li Shuangzi (李雙澤), and Hu Defu (胡德夫) inspired students throughout the island to take up their acoustic guitars and, as a

[117] Chen Da 陳達, *Minzu yueshou Chen Da he tade* ge 民族樂手陳達和他的歌 [Folk musician Chen Da and his songs], Taipei Xiwang, 1971, LP.

[118] Chen Da 陳達, *Chen Da yu Hengchundiao shuochang* 陳達與恆春調說唱 [Chen Da and Hengchun tune shuochang], First Records, 1979, LP.

[119] Liu Ching-chih, *A Critical History of New Music in China*, trans. Caroline Mason (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2010), 548.

popular slogan from the period put it, "sing their own songs" ("唱自己的歌").[120] Their efforts to define a local sound generated a number of different strategies: although cultural production during the earlier stages of the movement aligned closely with state-sanctioned nationalist ideologies—promoting the performance of "new Chinese folk songs" rather than American-style pop music—this "quickly gave way to 'Taiwanese folk songs,' with local references accentuated."[121] In a 2010 interview, music critic Ma Shih-fang noted Hsu Tsang-houei's "rediscovery" of Chen Da as a watershed moment in the development of the island's new folk sounds:

> We rediscovered Chen Da back in the 70s [during the Campus Folk Song Movement]…he made his first field recording back in the late 60s. But back then not too many people knew him except for the small circle of musicologists. And it wasn't until the mid-70s that Chen Da became a household name, and that was because some younger people invited him to come to Taipei to play in a folk club and younger people recognized his music, and then listened to his record. They were so shocked. At first they, you know, they listened to records from the U.S., they knew Mississippi John Hurt, they knew Robert Johnson…but after Chen Da they suddenly realized we have our own, and he's even cooler than Mississippi John Hurt! Some old guy playing his *yueqin*…So Chen Da was kind of an icon. After he was gone, people from the Modern Folk Songs Movement, and later Chen Ming-chang [of Blacklist Workshop], later the New Taiwanese Song movement, and later Taiwanese hip-hop and Taiwanese rock, they all went back to Chen Da.[122]

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[120] For a complete discussion of the Campus Folksong Movement, see Zhang Zhaowei 張釗維, *Shei zai nabian chang zijide ge* 誰在那邊唱自己的歌 [Who there sings their own songs?] (Taipei: Shibao wenhua chuban qiye youxian gongsi, 1994).

[121] Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, *Literary Culture in Taiwan: Martial Law to Market Law* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), 105.

[122] Ma, personal interview.

So even as *liām-kua* and the *shuochang* arts gradually shed their mantle as popular forms of entertainment in the latter half of the twentieth century, proponents of new folk music invested them with symbolic capital as authentic loci of Taiwanese folk culture. As such, celebrated practitioners—"song readers" like Chen Da—ascended to icon status and came to exert tremendous influence on the creation of new music during the 1970s and 80s. Ma suggests they even impacted the development of New Taiwanese Song and "Taiwanese hip-hop," a notion that I now wish to examine.

* * *

Chen Ming-chang was in his early twenties when Chen Da galvanized the new folk scene, and he became aware of the celebrated performer's work through the Cloud Gate Dance Theater's (*Yunmen Wuji* 雲門舞集) 1979 production "Heritage" (*Xinchuan* 薪傳), to which Chen Da had contributed music.[123] Chen Ming-chang describes his initial response to hearing Chen Da's work in a 2011 magazine article: "I discovered what I was lacking [in my music] was an emotional connection to the land, some reflection on local culture. Looking back on my old Mandarin-language works, I was really shocked."[124] Chen has often spoken about the influence of traditional musical narrative genres on his compositions; much of his work following Blacklist Workshop

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[123] Guo Lijuan 郭麗娟, "Jitazhongde rensheng gushi: Chen Mingzhang qingchun zaixian" 吉他中的人生故事：陳明章青春再現 [Human stories in the guitar: Chen Ming-chang rediscovers his youth], *Taiwan guanghua zazhi* 台灣光華雜誌 [Taiwan panorama], August 2011, http://www.taiwan-panorama.com/show_issue.php?id=201180008100c.txt&cur_page=1&distype=text&table=1&h1=&h2=&search=1&height=1&type=1&scope=0&order=1&keyword=%E9%99%B3%E6%98%8E%E7%AB%A0&lstPage=1&num=10&year=2011&month=08 (accessed November 5, 2011).

[124] Ibid.

has referenced Chen Da or other narrative singers in some way, and he is now himself a celebrated performer and teacher of *yueqin*.[125]

Liām-kua was a natural source of inspiration for Blacklist Workshop, as well as for Jutoupi and other musicians who played key roles in the development of rap music via New Taiwanese Song. Not only did *liām-kua* have political salience as a representation of an "authentic Taiwanese" expressive culture, but it also modeled techniques for embracing the tonemic contours of Hoklo and thereby rendering an intelligible communication of lyrics. Indeed, *liām-kua* is an example of what linguist and music scholar Chao Yuen Ren (趙元任) classified in the 1950s as a "singsong" style, which demands that its practitioners articulate lexical tones in musical performance.[126] Many performers of Hoklo popular songs produced after the 1930s had departed from this practice, preferring to marry pentatonic vocal lines and diatonic accompaniments without particular regard for preserving speech tone.[127] Performer and *liām-kua* scholar Wang Chen-yi (王振義) opines that in the 1950s and 60s, "many [Hoklo] songs were written in a way that tended to compromise the [Hoklo] language's tonal or musical quality, and the results sometimes made your flesh creep."[128] For participants in New

[125] For more about Chen Ming-chang and his activities as a *yueqin* performer and producer of recordings by *liām-kua* artists, see his homepage at http://www.cmcmusic.com.tw/.

[126] Yuen Ren Chao, "Tone, Intonation, Singsong, Chanting, Recitative, Tonal Composition, and Atonal Composition in Chinese," in *For Roman Jakobson: Essays on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. M. Halle, H.G. Lunt, H. Mclean, and C.H. Van Schooneveld (The Hague: Monton and Company, 1956), 52-59.

[127] Such compositions fall under the rubric of what Chao would have called "tonal style."

[128] Pat Gao, "Songs From the Roots," *Taiwan Review*, 1 April 2007, http://taiwanreview.nat.gov.tw/fp.asp?xItem=24039&ctNode=1364 (accessed 25

Taiwanese Song, the *liām-kua* style of performance offered the possibility of a corrective to this situation, that is, the restoration of greater semantic comprehensibility.[129] To this point, the rap tracks on *Songs of Madness* do not sound exactly like traditional *liām-kua*, but they clearly bear the imprint of the tradition in at least three respects. Firstly, they are largely in the Hoklo language and carefully preserve the tonemic inflection of lyrics. Secondly, they provide incisive social commentary and seek to inspire reflection on moral and ethical problems. Lastly, they are fully narrative, with vividly rendered characters and unfolding storylines.

The "singsong," storytelling quality of *liām-kua* called to mind the American rap music that had begun to infiltrate Taiwan's airwaves by the end of the 1980s. This resemblance generated an opportunity for Blacklist Workshop to suggest that *liām-kua*-style performance could speak to contemporary topics and appeal to contemporary ears. As Chen Ming-chang remarked in a 2000 interview published in the English-language

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November 2012). There is a range of opinions regarding the extent to which speakers of Sinitic languages preserve speech tone in popular song performance. Psychologists Randy L. Dielh and Patrick C.M. Wong maintain that pop artists working in Cantonese languages during the 1990s did try to maintain some semblance of tone. See "How Can the Lyrics of a Song in a Tone Language Be Understood?" *Psychology of Music* 30, no. 2 (2002): 202-209. Studies of Hoklo speech tone in music have not approached the question of comprehensibility but have nevertheless found a relatively weak relationship between melodic and tonal shapes at the syllabic level. See Wang Xiaoqing 王曉晴, "Cong youxuan lilun fenxi xiandai minnan yu gequ zhong yinyue yu yuyan zhi hudong" 從優選理論分析現代閩南語歌曲中音樂與語言之互動 [Interaction between music and language in modern songs of Taiwan Southern Min: An optimality theory analysis] (master's thesis, National Chengchi University, 2008).

[129] Sylvia Li-chun Lin does not comment specifically on the relationship of rap to *liām-kua*, but she does offer that "Taiwanhua, like Mandarin Chinese, is a tonal language. When put to music, the tones often change, sometimes to such an extent that the song is rendered unintelligible, even to native speakers. Speaking in rap is a convenient musical style for conveying powerful messages with less confusion and ambiguity." Lin, "Toward a New Identity," 89.

periodical *Taiwan Review*: "Rap versions of Taiwanese songs were new at that time, and listeners probably found them fresh…They dealt with things like the grief you get driving a taxi for a living. They had a strong local cultural flavor because they were essentially storytelling, true-to-life dramas."[130] Confirming this hypothesis, music critic Lin Zonghong (林宗弘), who recognized the presence of local musical narrative traditions in *Songs of Madness*, wrote in a 1993 article about the album: "The songs blend black reggae music, rap, and Taiwan's *tsa̍p-liām-á* [雜念仔, a synonym for *liām-kua*] style to portray the many facades of modern Taiwanese society."[131]

Blacklist Workshop alluded sonically to *liām-kua* but used the English term "rap" to describe their particular brand of speech-song vocal performance; Jutoupi made an even more direct reference to narrative song by titling his series of albums—which I have thus far referred to by their English name *Funny Rap—Funny Liām-kua* [*Tshiò-khui liām-kua* 笑魁唸歌]. None of the three-dozen or so rap tracks that Jutoupi recorded between 1994 and 1995 abide by the musical conventions of traditional *liām-kua*, but they retain its flavors in a manner similar to Blacklist Workshop's *Songs of Madness*. When I interviewed Zhu in 2010, he referred to a link between rap and *liām-kua* just a few moments into our conversation:

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[130] Because this interview was published in English, I do not know the source of the gloss "storytelling." I speculate that Chen probably used the term *liām-kua*, but cannot be certain. Kelly Her, "Songs From the Heart," *Taiwan Review*, April 1, 2000, http://taiwanreview.nat.gov.tw/fp.asp?xItem=497&CtNode=128 (accessed October 20, 2012).

[131] Lin Zonghong 林宗弘, "Zhuakuang ge" 抓狂歌 [Songs of madness], in *Taiwan liuxing yinyue: zui jia zhuanji* 台灣流行音樂：200 最佳專輯 [Taiwan popular music: 200 best albums], ed. Tao Xiaoqing 陶曉清, Ma Shih-fang 馬世芳, and Ye Yunping 葉雲平 (Taipei: Shibao Wenhua, 2009), 38-39.

> Before the concept of rap emerged, it already existed as a part of old Taiwanese folksongs, *liām-kua*. [Jutoupi sings "The Beggar's Tune"; *khit-tsia̍h-tiāu* 乞丐調.] That's the "Beggar's Tune," I think that's what it's called. It's like Mississippi blues….In the early days, it was more speaking than melody, like *shuochang*…[132]

In Zhu's formulation, rap is a "concept" (*gainian* 概念) rather than a genre, defined as an integrated speech-song technique that has a life prior to and apart from contemporary hip-hop. While he frames rap and *liām-kua* as independent exercises, Zhu suggested to me that rap is comprehensible to him as a Taiwanese listener in part because of its points of consonance with the *liām-kua* tradition. Indeed, his argument that rap "already existed as part of old Taiwanese folksongs" attributes to *liām-kua* a prescient quality, a sense of latent modernity and inherent compatibility with global cosmopolitan trends. Zhu's reference to the Mississippi blues calls to mind Ma Shih-fang's statements regarding the reception of Chen Da's music in the 1970s, when listeners "suddenly realized we have our own, and he's even cooler than Mississippi John Hurt!" Zhu and Ma posit *liām-kua* as echoing or even anticipating the forms of African American expressive culture that ultimately informed the development of hip-hop. Their perspectives bind the histories of these three genres—*liām-kua*, blues, and rap—closely together.

For all the similarities between their two projects, Jutoupi's rapprochement with both *liām-kua* and hip-hop is more explicit than Blacklist Workshop's. The title "*Funny Liām-kua*" makes the series' intentions comparatively plain, and Jutoupi's vocalizations deploy certain idiomatic features of *liām-kua* performance that are absent from *Songs of Madness*. For example, on the track "Taiwan Language Battle" [IF U 惦惦 NO BODY

[132] Jutoupi, personal interview.

SAY U 矮狗], Jutoupi plays the parts of multiple characters the way a traditional *liām-kua* performer might, by changing the register and timbre of his voice in imitation of different personalities.[133] The song describes a journey into the heart of Taipei, wherein the narrator notes that he is surrounded by signage in foreign languages, advertising everything from pachinko parlors and karaoke to Kentucky Fried Chicken and Tower Records. As he steeps in this visual cacophony, he overhears conversations among speakers of Japanese-accented English, Taiwanese Mandarin (*Taiwan guoyu* 台灣國語), and official standard Mandarin.[134] One female character is performed by a guest vocalist, but Jutoupi takes on the rest himself, as in this excerpt:

S1: 同學你幾歲阿 / S2: 我洗腳水啦
S3: 老師你鑰匙掉了 / S4: 沒有關係
S5: How old are you? / S6: 阿ㄋㄟ I'm dirty.

S1: *Classmate, how old are you?* / S2: *That's my footbath water.*
S3: *Teacher, you dropped your keys* / S4: *It doesn't matter.*
S5: *How old are you?* / S6: *Well, I'm dirty.*

Jutoupi assumes the roles of all six speakers (S#) here, each attempting some part of an exchange that generates a comical misunderstanding. In the first, a student (S1) speaking official standard Mandarin asks another student (S2) his age, to which the other student intends to respond "I'm nineteen years old" (*wo shijiu sui la*). Because of his thick Hoklo accent, however, the utterance sounds more like the nonsense phrase "That's my footbath water" (*wo xijiao shui la*). In the second, a student (S3) intends to tell his

[133] Jutoupi 豬頭皮, "IF U 惦惦 NO BODY SAY U 矮狗" [Taiwan language battle], *Wo shi shenjingbing* 我是神經病 [Jutoupi's funny rap], Rock Records, 1994, compact disc.

[134] By "Taiwanese Mandarin," I refer to the Hoklo-, Hakka-, Japanese-, and Aboriginal language-inflected Mandarin that is commonly spoken on the island.

teacher "You've dropped your keys" (*ni yaoshi diaole*). Again, because of his accent—especially his tendency to substitute the retroflex sibilant with a dental sibilant—it sounds more as if he is prophesying, "You're going to die" (*ni yao sidiaole*), to which the teacher responds (S4) nonchalantly, "It doesn't matter." Finally, a fluent English-speaker (S5) asks the age of someone with a heavy Japanese accent (S6), who intends to respond that he is thirty but stumbles over the voiceless dental fricative such that he declares himself to have a personal hygiene problem. The song's lyrics highlight the difficulties of communicating about even the most prosaic things in Taiwan's multilingual society, thereby providing a subtle critique of the KMT's attempts to "standardize" speech on the island through imposition of Mandarin as the national language.[135]

Jutoupi's performance of multiple characters in rapid succession calls to mind the rhythms of comic *liām-kua*, but the track's use of extended vocal techniques—specifically the style of vocal percussion known as "beatboxing"—places it equally in the sound world of hip-hop. Beatboxing has been identified with hip-hop since the 1980s, brought to prominence by rap artists such as Doug E. Fresh and Biz Markie, and has the "primary aim to create *convincing impersonations* of drum tracks."[136] In "Taiwan Language Battle," Jutoupi beatboxes for much of the song's duration, mimicking the

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[135] For additional perspectives on "Taiwan Language Battle," vis-à-vis "language anxieties" on the island, see D.J. Hatfield, "How to Spell Global, or Transliteration Debates and Narratives of Globalization in Taipei/Taibei/Taipak/…For Example," *Knowledge and Discourse: Speculating on Disciplinary Futures, 2nd International Conference (Web Proceedings)* (Hong Kong, July, 2003), 8-10, accessed May 2, 2013. http://djhatfield.com/taiwansoundscapes.html.

[136] Dan Stowell and Mark D. Plumbley, "Characteristics of the Beatboxing Vocal Style: Technical Report C4DM-TR-08-01," *Faculty Page of Professor Mark D. Plumbley, University of London.* February 19, 2008, http://goblin.elec.qmul.ac.uk/people/markp/2008/StowellPlumbley08-tr0801.pdf.

sounds of a snare drum, hi-hat, and bass drum, as well as attempting a vocal approximation of a DJ scratching a record. To this end, he employs an array of techniques, including lip oscillations, inhaled sounds, and growls. The use of beatboxing accompaniment as opposed to a traditional instrument such as *yueqin* creates a novel backdrop for Jutoupi's *liām-kua* stylings. Moreover, his combination of these disparate elements constitutes a sonic representation of the process of modernization, globalization, and hybridization that the lyrics so neatly describe.

Following in Jutoupi's footsteps, Taipei-based Kou Chou Ching has described their music in Hoklo as "*tsiàⁿ-káng tâi-uân-bī liām-kua*" [正港台灣味唸歌]—a phrase that translates as "real Taiwan-style *liām-kua*"—and in English as "Taiwan traditional hip hop style."[137] The group, which comprises two MCs, a DJ, and two instrumentalists with backgrounds in traditional musics, formed in 2003 and has attracted a significant underground following on the island. Like both Blacklist Workshop and Jutoupi, the music of Kou Chou Ching manifests a deep engagement with social and political activism, and group members are outspoken in their support for Taiwan sovereignty. As such, their work reflects an abiding interest in local cultural practice in both its form and content. When I interviewed MC Fan Chiang (*Fan Jiang* 范姜) in 2010, he described his notion of hip-hop not as a formula for emulating American artists, but as a set of guidelines for (re)discovering and (re)deploying local sonic artifacts in compositions that comment on issues of local importance. Invoking *liām-kua* in their translation of "hip-hop," Kou Chou Ching channels that genre's historical significance as both a source of such commentary and a potent symbol of Taiwanese cultural heritage:

[137] Kou Chou Ching's official Web site, www.kou.com.tw.

> Most elderly people think they don't really understand hip-hop. They think, "I don't know what you're talking about." But actually when these elderly people were young, they listened to something similar, what we often refer to as *liām-kua*. It's actually very similar, although from the perspective of the music it's different, it's actually very similar. It sounds like rap, like old-school rap stuff. And it also has freestyle, and it has to come from the heart because it doesn't have written lyrics. It comes from the heart—whatever you think of you just rap it. Then you rhyme, rhyme, rhyme…[138]

Fan Chiang suggests that *liām-kua* and hip-hop share qualities that make the two forms mutually comprehensible even if they developed independently of one another. Based on their exposure to *liām-kua*, he opines, older audiences should be able to access Kou Chou Ching's brand of "real Taiwan-style hip hop," which features vocals that shift back and forth along the speech-song continuum and enacts similar kinds of improvisation and rhyme. Acknowledging that they are different in their particulars, Fan Chiang nevertheless constructs hip-hop as a continuation of local tradition.[139]

The group further cultivates this relationship through sampling traditional musics, including *liām-kua* and pieces associated with other *shuochang* genres. Their song "Against Nature" [*G̍ek-thiⁿ* 逆天] samples Chen Da's *yueqin* accompaniment from his "Laborer's Song" [*Tn̂g-kang kua* 長工歌]; "Good Appetite" [*Hó-tshùi-táu* 好嘴斗] samples *shuochang* performer Qi Linbo's (其麟伯) *yueqin* and voice from his

[138] Fan Chiang 范姜, personal interview, 7 April 2010.

[139] For additional perspective on Kou Chou Ching's approach to reconciling global and local influences, see D.J. Hatfield, "Folklore and the Cosmopolitan Real: Of Hip Hop and History" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, Honolulu, HI, October 2006), accessed May 2, 2013, http://djhatfield.com/taiwansoundscapes.html.

"Improvisation on the Burning of a Fishnet-Drying Hut" [*Húe-sio ko liâu sûi hîng khek* 火燒罟寮隨興曲]; and "Tiu Tiu Thinking Of" [*Tiu-tiu su-sióng-khí* 丟丟思想起] builds its groove on repeating melodic fragments from the children's folk song "*Tiu-tiu-tâng*" [丟丟銅] and the Hengchun *shuochang* tune "Thinking Of…" [*Su-sióng-khí* 思想起].[140] In each of these, traditional narrative song is interpolated into Kou Chou Ching's newer narratives about environmental degradation, the decline of Taiwanese outdoor banquet culture, and the loss of childhood innocence, respectively. Layers upon layers of stories blur the line between traditional narrative and contemporary rap practices.

The below excerpt from the 2008 track "Good Appetite"[141] provides a glimpse of the group's approach to integrating their "real Taiwan-style *liām-kua*" with a sample from a recording of narrative song, the legendary Qi Linbo's "Improvisation on the Burning of a Fishnet-Drying Hut."[142] In brief, "Good Appetite" explores the decline of Taiwanese open-air banquet culture, as the custom of setting up outdoor tables to commemorate major lifecycle events has gradually given way to indoor celebrations at luxury hotels and catering facilities. Kou Chou Ching's lyrics mourn the loss of the tactile pleasures of community and the cultural practices that have traditionally attended outdoor festivities, including performances of Taiwanese opera and *beiguan* (北管)

[140] These songs all appear on Kou Chou Ching's debut full-length album *Kou!! It's Coming Out!!!* Kou Chou Ching 拷秋勤, *Kao! Chulaile* 拷！出來了 [Kou!! It's coming out!!!], independent release, 2008, compact disc.

[141] Kou Chou Ching 拷秋勤, "Hó-tshùi-táu" 好嘴斗 [Good appetite], *Kao! Chulaile* 拷！出來了 [Kou!! It's coming out!!!], independent release, 2008, compact disc.

[142] Qi Linbo 其鱗伯, "Hóe-sio ko liâu sûi hèng khek" 火燒罟寮隨興曲 [Improvisation on the burning of a fishnet-drying hut], *Xiao liuqiu Qi Linbo: Taiwan zuihoude zouchangren* 小琉球其鱗伯：台灣最後的走唱人 [Little Ryukyu Qi Linbo: Taiwan's last itinerant singer], Himalaya Records, 2002, compact disc.

music.[143] One measure of Qi's *yueqin* accompaniment (m.1) is fodder for an ostinato figure that repeats for the duration of the piece. It is doubled every so often by a *suona* (嗩吶) (mm. 2-3 and 6-7), a double-reed woodwind instrument sometimes referred to as a "Chinese shawm," performed by one of the group's two instrumentalists. The resulting effect is one of persistent nostalgia—a sound that, by virtue of its associations with traditional culture, creates an aura of pastness. For those attentive to the sample's original context, highlighted in the liner notes to the album on which "Good Appetite" appears, the intertextual interplay between Qi's narrative and Kou Chou Ching's provides perspective on the time period during which outdoor banquets were common. Indeed, "Improvisation on the Burning of a Fishnet-Drying Hut" is not about the joys of life in a simpler time, but about the bitterness of lost love and the tragic outcomes of a poor marriage in a rural seaside village. As MCs Fish Lin and Fan Chiang rap about the olden days, when those living in agrarian Taiwan labored hard and had less to eat, the sample reminds informed listeners that outdoor banquets traditionally punctuated lives of privation and struggle. Qi's voice, which appears once in the below excerpt (m.8) and sporadically throughout the song, anoints Kou Chou Ching his successors in storytelling.

[143] *Beiguan*, referred to in Hoklo as *pak-koán* and commonly translated in English as "northern pipes," is a genre of traditional ensemble music that dates to eighteenth-century Fujian but achieved great popularity in Taiwan over the next several centuries. It is difficult to characterize stylistically, having both loud and strident qualities (as in *beiguan* percussion and wind ensembles) and quieter, more restrained qualities (as in *beiguan* silk and bamboo ensembles). *Beiguan* is performed at a wide variety of outdoor events in Taiwan, including funerals, weddings, and temple festivals. As a theatrical music, it is also features prominently in performances of *gezaixi* and *budaixi*.



Musical Example 1: Transcription of excerpt from Kou Chou Ching's "Good Appetite" [好嘴斗], approx. 1:20-1:40

To this point, I have focused largely on musicians who perform in Hoklo, befitting the fact that *liām-kua* is a Hoklo-language genre. But I interviewed a number of rappers working in Mandarin who also conceive of traditional musical storytelling genres as an earlier iteration of their contemporary art. Taipei-based MC Manchuker, for example, suggested that the roots of Mandarin hip-hop lie in an array of theatrical and *shuochang* styles:

> Chinese people had hip-hop a long time ago, Chinese people had rap a long time ago, Chinese people had r&b a long time ago. It's just that we never updated our skill, we never updated our style… Like before, like those Chinese operas, *jingju*, *xiangsheng*—they're all hip-hop! They were telling the stories of society, just like how American people do with R&B and hip-hop these days. So it's already in our blood. We just have to find a new way to express it.[144]

Manchuker propounds a sense of continuity among the narrative impulses of hip-hop and mainland Chinese genres like Peking opera (*jingju* 京劇) and cross-talk (*xiangsheng* 相聲). His comments can be understood as emanating from a desire not merely to localize rap music, but to claim it as *already* local. Even more pertinent to our discussion in this chapter, he suggests that rap music—whether we call it *xiha*, *raoshe*, or *liām-kua*—constitutes an "update" of something "already in our blood." By this logic, rap fulfills a crucial role once performed by traditional narrative genres, to tell "the stories of society."[145]

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[144] Manchuker 滿人, personal interview, 21 September 2010.

[145] Ethnomusicologist Patricia Tang and hip-hop scholar Tony Mitchell have written about similar attempts to connect rap to local musical narrative genres in Senegal and Italy, respectively. See Patricia Tang, "The Rapper as Modern Griot: Reclaiming African Traditions," in *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World*, ed. Eric Charry (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 79-91; and Tony Mitchell,

It bears noting that not everyone is sold on the notion of rap as an outgrowth or continuation of *liām-kua*; some performers feel strongly that rap music in Taiwan derives its narrative impulse and formal characteristics from American hip-hop, which itself has deep roots in Afro-diasporic oral and literary narrative traditions. Teacher Lin of the Tripoets has written: "There are some who would place Taiwan-style rap in the same lineage as earlier artists like Huang Kelin or Liu Fuzhu, but I think this is unnecessary because their works didn't have the attitude of rap. *Liām-kua* is *liām-kua*—there's no need to call it rap. That would be like calling a toy propeller the predecessor of the helicopter."[146] Based on a number of conversations with Lin, I do not think he intends to imply that *liām-kua* is simple (a toy) and rap complex (a helicopter), but rather to dispute the notion that common features in different forms of expressive culture indicate an evolutionary or historical link between them. And yet I would argue that even if rap and *liām-kua* developed along entirely separate trajectories, the examples I have provided in this narrative indicate that a number of artists in Taiwan have found meaning in meditating on their shared resonances.

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In this, the last of three narratives, I have examined the history of rap in Taiwan in terms of its identity as *liām-kua*. I began by providing an overview of the genre's key features, including its origins, performance practices, musical characteristics, and

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Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 162-172.

[146] Lin et al., *Sanpi*, 11. Singers Huang Kelin (黃克林) and Liu Fuzhu (劉福助) revived interest in new recordings of Taiwanese and Hakkanese folk music, particularly *shuochang*, in the 1970s and 1980s. Kou Chou Ching has recorded at least one track—2008's "Kelin Lebu" 克林樂部 [Kelin fanclub]—that features guest vocals by Huang.

narrative types. I then discussed the detrimental effects of both Japanese colonial and KMT policies on *liām-kua*'s sustainability, and noted the island's post-war transition from an agrarian to industrial economy as accelerating its decline as a form of popular entertainment. Just as *liām-kua* receded from awareness around the 1950s, however, musicologists Hsu Tsang-houei and Shih Wei-liang "rediscovered" narrative balladeers like Hengchun's Chen Da, and restored them to public attention through popular recordings and concerts. Nurtured by a resurgence in interest in folk music during the late 1960s and 70s, *liām-kua* and related styles of *shuochang* performance attained new levels of prestige as authentic loci of Taiwanese expressive culture. The genres influenced subsequent generations of popular musicians, particularly those who would ultimately come to prominence as architects of New Taiwanese Song. The rap performances of Blacklist Workshop and Jutoupi, in particular, are clearly influenced by *liām-kua*. More recently, groups like Kou Chou Ching have continued to plumb the depths of the relationships among rap and traditional narrative song, not only labeling their music *liām-kua*, but also sampling from historic recordings by eminent *liām-kua* performers and incorporating melodic materials derived from the *liām-kua* tune matrix.

* * *

In Part One, I have eschewed a unified doctrine that suggests a greater stylistic or ideological homogeneity among Taiwan's past and present rap artists than truly exists, and instead written a history that is multivalent and multivocal. By distilling the numerous and varied stories imparted to me by members of the rap community into three separate but overlapping narratives, I have endeavored to elucidate the myriad pathways by which rap has acquired its current multifaceted character. My goal has not been to

legitimate one discourse at the expense of the others, but to demonstrate that all are equally valid means of describing the music's development on the island. I suggest that rap as a conceptual category permits its performers in Taiwan to inscribe within it a variety of meanings that in turn open on to many pasts. But I wish to underscore that, at present, the multiple glosses—*xiha*, *raoshe*, and *liām-kua*—I have highlighted are often used interchangeably, impressionistically, and evocatively by members of the community. One can deploy *raoshe* in *xiha*; just as in the English "rap" and "hip-hop," those terms often appear as synonyms even if "hip-hop" refers more technically to a composite cultural movement and "rap" to a specific musical practice. Likewise, as Kou Chou Ching demonstrates, *liām-kua* can be conceived as a way of doing *xiha* locally. What one calls rap is not an exact science—on the contrary, following Thomas Turino we might posit rap as a "rich semiotic mode," capable of conferring diverse meanings on its diverse performers and audiences.[147]

That said, the *xiha* narrative has clearly emerged as dominant in the present scene. MC Hotdog and Dog G, who identify closely with the hip-hop tradition and respond palpably to global hip-hop trends in their work, are the island's most influential rap artists. When performers take the stage, many clothe themselves in symbolically significant hip-hop attire, including baseball caps, limited-edition sneakers, work boots, and baggy pants. Moreover, as I explore more fully in Part Two, the performance practices, rituals, and organizational structures of the Taiwan rap community strongly resemble or are modeled on those associated with hip-hop cultural practice. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that Taiwan rap is not merely localized hip-hop, but a more dynamic,

[147] Thomas Turino, "Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: A Peircian Semiotic Theory for Music," *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1999): 237.

multifaceted cultural formation distinguished by its multiple, rich historical legacies.

Part Two

Keeping it Real:
Exploring Rap's Interpretive Community

September 27, 2009. I stand in an open lot in the middle of Tainan City, ringed by dilapidated buildings and graffitied walls, many plastered with old advertisements that have faded and partially peeled away from the sun and humidity. It is nightfall when Kou Chou Ching takes the stage, by which time the event—the "921.87 Benefit Concert" for victims of Typhoon Morakot—is already in its fifth or sixth hour. I am deeply tired, wiped out by the heat that radiates from the concrete facades of Tainan even after the day is long over. A native of the temperate American northeast, I cannot habituate to the tropical climate of the island's south, no matter how much time I spend here. But as Kou Chou Ching launches into its set, I feel a shockwave go through the crowd and I am instantly riveted back to life. A nearby temple sends fireworks into the air, but not even the thunderous sound of explosions or the sight of lights filling the sky diverts my attention from the performance. The intermittent blasts register as errant beats, out of time and out of place, but otherwise unworthy of attention. One by one, audience members press their bodies against the stage. Kou Chou Ching summons them to put up their hands and thrash along to the beat, and they enthusiastically oblige. As MC Fish Lin reaches the climax of the pro-independence anthem "Your Name is TAIWAN" [Lí kài bêng, kiò-chò Tâi-ôan-lâng 汝介名, 叫做台灣人]*, he calls out in English to the audience, "Say Tai-wan!" and basks in their willing reply, "TAI-WAN!" He repeats this call-and-response pattern over and over: "Say Tai-wan!" "TAI-WAN!" "Say Tai-wan!" "TAI-*

WAN!" "Say Tai-wan!" "TAI-WAN!!!!" Each repetition invites greater intensity from the audience. More fireworks sail into the sky from the temple, more firecrackers shatter, but we—now a moving and vocalizing collective—are all so captivated by the performance that we hardly even notice.

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In *Music As Social Life: The Politics of Participation*, Thomas Turino characterizes "participatory performance" as "a particular field of activity in which stylized sound and motion are conceptualized most importantly as heightened social interaction. In participatory music making one's primary attention is on the activity, on *the doing*, and on the other participants, rather than on an end product that results from the activity."[1] The above vignette depicts precisely this kind of event, in which the line between artist and audience is blurred and all are induced to play a part in the making of sound and spectacle. Responding to Fish Lin's injunction to "Say Tai-wan!" audience members at the concert in Tainan, myself included, were drawn into Kou Chou Ching's performance and, pursuant to a common mission, momentarily knitted to one another. Call-and-response patterning—which Samuel Floyd has called "the master trope" of African-American music[2] and Cheryl Keyes "the life force of black communication"[3]—is fundamental to hip-hop, and contributes to a sense of rap around the world as participatory in the way that Turino describes. A paradigmatic hip-hop gesture positions

[1] Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 28.

[2] Samuel Floyd, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 95.

[3] Cheryl Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 26.

the MC onstage, mic held out to the crowd, exhorting audience members to make their voices heard in the fashion of Fish Lin's "Say Tai-wan!" Call-and-response patterning is not a regular feature of Taiwan's traditional or popular musics. It is, for example, absent from musico-theatrical forms like *gezaixi* and narrative traditions like *liām-kua*; while Mandopop artists might call out to audiences to wave their plastic glowsticks or join in on a chorus, such gestures typically serve as decorative flourishes rather than as structural interventions. The heightened social interaction that transpires when performers request that audiences raise their fists, dance, or reply to a verbal provocation in one way distinguishes Taiwan rap from other approaches to music-making on the island.

In Part One, I explored the development of Taiwan rap in terms of three distinct but overlapping historical narratives. Moving forward, I turn my attention to the present. I begin here with reflection on rap as a mode of participatory performance in order to emphasize the importance of thinking about today's artists and audiences as creative collaborators, members of a common community. The bridge between their worlds exists not just in the moment of performance, but also as a feature of rap music's broader social dynamics in Taiwan: rappers emerge from the core and long-term communities and remain invested in the continued vitality of these communities, even after establishing reputations for themselves as professionals. They interface with audiences not just from the concert stage but also in more intimate venues such as public lectures, university club meetings, and online bulletin boards where they maintain their previous identities as commentators. Even luminaries like MC Hotdog and Dog G are not untouchable but circulate freely among crowds at shows and take on mentorship roles for aspiring performers.

Given the proximity of artists and audiences and the degree to which rap is, in multiple dimensions, a participatory act in Taiwan, it follows that consideration of the music must by necessity intertwine with an ethnographic account of the people, places, and practices that constitute the rap community. As noted earlier, Imani Perry underlines the centrality of community in hip-hop discourses of "realness," describing "the Real" as "the location where an individual remains committed to his or her community, professes that allegiance, and remains honestly and organically rooted in his or her position in the world."[4] In Part Two, I examine the various communities that give rise to the rap community in Taiwan, whose stories Taiwan's rappers seeks to tell. In this effort, I am guided by literary theorist Stanley E. Fish's notion of "interpretive communities," an influential precept of reader-response theory.[5] Fish proposes that interpretive communities—whose members are united by shared epistemologies and interpretive strategies—bear responsibility for not just deciphering but also constituting the meaning of texts. This is not to say that texts have no empirical or stable meanings independent of interpretation, but that all readings are, to some extent, socially constructed. I propose that those who participate in the performance and consumption of rap in Taiwan constitute an interpretive community, one that coheres around not only shared affection for the music, but also shared participation in a web of local organizations that includes university hip-hop culture clubs, online bulletin boards, and creative collectives.[6] In the

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[4] Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 88.

[5] Stanley E. Fish, "Interpreting the *Varorium*," *Critical Inquiry* 2 (Spring 1976): 465-85.

[6] Invoking feminist cultural theorist Jacqueline Bobo, Cheryl Keyes has also written about the notion of "interpretive community" in the reception of American rap. See

following pages, I sketch a series of portraits of these organizations and the group of dynamic individuals who play prominent and variegated roles in them, with the objective of offering an aperture onto the experience of making, performing, and taking pleasure in Taiwan rap.

I separate my discussion into two main sections, which sequentially explore the people (the aforementioned individuals) and places (locations and organizations) I encountered during my fieldwork on the island. With recourse to these elements as constitutive of Taiwan rap's interpretive community, I lay critical groundwork for understanding the stories rappers tell and the processes by which their stories become meaningful to others. I periodically extend the "Tale From the Field" with which I began this part, chronicling a September 2009 benefit concert in Tainan. Brief episodes from this event, which featured a number of prominent artists and attracted audiences from all over the island, provide a running narrative thread that anchors my discussion and illustrates some of the phenomena I explore.

PEOPLE: THEY WHO SHARE A NARRATED WORLD

Revived and reinvigorated by Kou Chou Ching's performance, I decide to separate from the crowd and take in the scene from a greater distance. As I push through throngs of people to move away from the stage and toward the back of the lot, I note the faces passing by: I am afloat in a churning sea of young men. The vast majority are simply and tidily attired in jeans and t-shirts, and many record the spectacle onstage using cellphones and sophisticated digital cameras. In their appearance, they are typical

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Cheryl Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 188.

urban Taiwanese university students and young professionals, albeit ones with a penchant for local, Japanese, and American streetwear brands—I spot baseball caps, bags, and other accessories emblazoned with the unmistakable signs of A Bathing Ape, Swagger, Nong Li, Tribal, and Joker. A group of men to the right of the stage have a slightly more rebellious look: shaved heads, heavy chain necklaces, yakuza-style tattoos, and black t-shirts that read "Fuck China" in stark white lettering.

As I move further away from the stage the crowd begins to diversify. Some young women come into view, and a small number of elderly people and little children clasp hands at the perimeter of the lot. Unlike the thick bands of young men closer to the stage, many of whom raise their hands and thrash their bodies in synchrony with the music, they are mostly still, watchful. I turn to a twenty-something girl at my left and ask her which act she has most enjoyed so far. She gestures to a flimsy pink and white striped plastic bag full of vegetables in her right hand and replies that she is merely passing by, on her way from the market. I surmise that most of the women, elderly people, and children I see scattered around would tell similar stories. In little waves, they appear and disappear.

The tide of young men towards the front of the lot, however, continues to surge. They welcome every link in a long chain of performers, from Kou Chou Ching to Chang Jui-chuan to Brotherhood, Young Souljaz, the Tripoets, Soft Lipa, RPG, Young Star, MC Hotdog, MJ 116, Xiao Ren, and others. Never having seen most of these artists live, I am likewise entranced. It seems like most of the scene's brightest stars are here, and this run-down lot is, momentarily, a sparkling firmament. Kou Chou Ching step down after performing their third and final song, and Dog G takes the stage…

* * *

Writing about Anglo-Western and Central Australian Aboriginal oral traditions, Danièle M. Klapproth gainfully explores storytelling as a "relational act between (at least) one narrator and one narratee, the most fundamental purpose of which is the communicative sharing of a narrated world."[7] By these measures, stories, whether written or oral, function primarily as instruments of intercourse—they exist to form bridges between subjects, to nurture what philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer referred to as the "fusion of horizons."[8] At the outset of this project exploring rap as a form of musical narrative discourse, I wondered: What entities does that bridge span in Taiwan? Who are the "song readers," and to whom do they read their songs? Wandering the lot where the performance I describe above took place, I formed my first impressions of the demographics of Taiwan rap: performers and audiences alike were predominantly male, between their late teens and mid-thirties in age, and, judging from their fashionable clothes and brandishing of high-end phones and recording devices, from comfortable socioeconomic backgrounds.

Over the following seventeen months, I sought deeper awareness of the broader patterns of demographic representation in the scene and, by extension, knowledge of the terms in which community members understand their own identities. In *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*, music theorist Adam Krims notes that hip-hop culture as a global phenomenon "foregrounds identity with an explicitness well-nigh unprecedented even in

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[7] Danièle M. Klapproth, *Narrative as Social Practice: Anglo-Western and Australian Aboriginal Oral Traditions* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004), 105.

[8] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* [Truth and Method], 2nd ed., trans. and ed. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004).

the ethnically and gender-loaded world of popular musics."[9] This quality of rap—crystallized in the dual imperatives to "represent" and "keep it real"—raises particularly thorny questions in Taiwan, where debates about the nature of Taiwanese identity have figured prominently in the cultural, political, and intellectual discourses since the late 1970s. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, "Taiwaneseness" finds expression in a variety of overlapping identity schema, including national identity (Do you consider yourself Chinese or Taiwanese?), political persuasion (Are you pan green or pan blue?), and regional identity (Are you from the north, south, middle, or some other part of the island?). As I prepared to interview participants in the Taiwan rap scene about themselves, I did not know which, if any, of these modes of self-knowing would emerge most prominently.

In formulating questions for my research associates, I ultimately elected not to ask about Taiwaneseness, per se, but to focus on identity vis-à-vis the interlocking categories of ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. I arrived at these categories largely in light of their prominence in the discourse about hip-hop culture in the United States and around the world, which has often focused on rap music's power as a mode of resistance to racial/ethnic, political, and economic hegemonies. In the Taiwan context, I wondered, would the demographics of rap configure themselves around similar axes of oppressor-oppressed? If so, which of the island's multiple ethnic groups would be most strongly represented in the scene? Likewise, would the politics of gender in Taiwan rap echo those of American rap? How would performers account for the absence of women—on stage and in the audience—so readily apparent at the concert I describe above? Lastly,

[9] Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9.

how would participants in Taiwan's rap scene identify in terms of socioeconomic status? Keeping in mind that hip-hop's American ambassadors have tended to represent the socioeconomic extremes of drastic urban poverty and, more recently, mega mogul-type wealth, what would we find in Taiwan's overwhelmingly middle-class society?[10] I was motivated to push the discourse about identity in this project in lesser-explored directions, especially given that the current generation of young people on the island has often expressed a keen sense of "identity fatigue," that is, exhaustion induced by relentless discussion of cross-strait relations and the epistemological status of "Taiwaneseness."[11] Indeed, the intractable identity debate as a cornerstone of politics has so preoccupied scholars over the last twenty years that we have often ceased to ask questions about other modes of self-identification. I hoped to learn more about the experiences of members of the rap community as men and women, as participants in Taiwan's transforming economy, and as members of diverse ethnic communities.

Stories about their lives and the lives of their families, friends, and colleagues poured out from those I interviewed. They described their growing up experiences, their love and hatred of the island's educational system, their awakening to rap music, their political positions, their relationship statuses, their future plans. As each account unfolded, a more complete picture of rap's interpretive community emerged and a more palpable sense of the entities on either side of narrative's bridge. In this section, I first

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[10] Although rap music continues to be identified with poverty and ghetto life on the island, the notion of successful rappers as wealthy and powerful has also gained traction in recent years. For more on the hip-hop mogul figure, see Christopher Holmes Smith, "'I Don't Like to Dream about Getting Paid': Representations of Social Mobility and the Emergence of the Hip-Hop Mogul," *Social Text* 21, no. 4 (2003): 69-97.

[11] Dafydd Fell, *Government and Politics in Taiwan* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 133.

provide an overview of the demographics of rap in terms of ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status as they are currently represented in the scene and were in turn conveyed to me. I also profile two performers in order to provide additional points of entry into the rap community, grounded in the particulars of life paths, personal ambitions, and idiosyncratic perspectives.

The Demographics of Taiwan Rap: Ethnicity

From its inception in the late 1980s, rap music in Taiwan has served as a space in which artists perform stories that spring from and speak to their unique experiences as members of diverse ethnic communities. In this sense, the cultural polyphony of Taiwan rap echoes the island's complex history of colonial encounter, from the Dutch and Spanish imperialist campaigns and mass migration of Han peoples from Fujian and Guangdong during the seventeenth century, to the Japanese occupation during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, to the formation of the Republic of China on Taiwan during the mid-twentieth century. Moreover, the formal properties of the music were forged in the crucible of globalization, as elements of hip-hop cultural practice born in the United States collided with both local musical narrative performance traditions and an already-syncretic broader popular music culture.

Keeping in mind the current impetus toward multicultural consciousness in Taiwan, it is interesting to think about how rap music may constitute, in both its form and content, a process of critical reflection on the island's complex ethnic identity politics. Paul Gilroy has referred to "voices within hip-hop culture that have sought…strategies for living with difference and building on the hybrid qualities of the form itself to affirm

the value of mixing and what might be called creolization."[12] Indeed, rap is a bricolage genre that endows its authors with the power to invent, repurpose, rearrange, distort, juxtapose, and comment verbally on sonic ephemera in meaningful ways. Nation-conscious African-American artists like Rakim, according to Gilroy, invoke this process as an opportunity to explore "the consequences of a new political ontology and a new historicity" relevant to contemporary discourses of black nationalism.[13] Enlarging our aperture to contain not only the music but also the identity politics in which the music is embedded, the lifting of martial law reasserts itself as a critical condition of possibility for Taiwan rap. Indeed, it was only following the end of martial law that artists could openly explore questions related to ethnicity and begin to challenge prevailing narratives about their own identities—to really "keep it real."

The rap scene that I encountered when I began my research in 2009 was overwhelmingly Han in its makeup, but community members hail from diverse, and often mixed, ethnic backgrounds. While only a few artists make their affiliations an explicit feature of their performance—for example, Fish Lin and Fan Chiang of Kou Chou Ching, who refer to themselves as "Hoklo MC Fish Lin" and "Hakka MC Fan Chiang"—I found most to be forthcoming about their backgrounds in interviews.

Native Taiwanese/*Benshengren*

Befitting the majority status of Hoklo people on the island, few artists found it necessary to identify themselves explicitly in interviews as Hoklo but instead gestured

[12] Paul Gilroy, "It's a Family Affair," in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 102-103.

[13] Ibid.,103.

toward their Hoklo-ness in other ways, sometimes by referring to their extended family using Hoklo kinship terms, noting their membership in the Hoklo-dominated Presbyterian Church, or mentioning that their ancestors came from Fujian several hundred years ago. In some cases, strong identification with a particular region of origin served as a proxy for a clear declaration of Hoklo heritage. Dog G, for example, is closely identified with his hometown of Tainan, a major city in southwestern Taiwan with a majority Hoklo population. Although he refers to himself as "Taiwanese" [*Tâi-ôan-lâng* 台灣人] and requests that others speak to him whenever possible in the "Taiwanese language" [*Tâi-gí* 台語], he uses both as a shorthand for Hoklo.

The relatively small number of artists who identify as Hakka tend to be more direct about their ethnic affiliations, which others are less likely to assume given their overall minority status in the population and a general paucity of attention to Hakka language and culture in the popular discourse. For example, the group Dai Shiyao and Playa Club (*Dai Shiyao & Wanle julebu* 戴士堯 & 玩樂俱樂部) write in the liner notes to their eponymous 2010 album of their desire to make "Hakka hip-hop music a starting point for reinterpreting Hakka culture that is gradually being lost"[14]; amateur performer Hsieh Hsuan-chi (*Xie Xuanqi* 謝宣圻) encourages Hakka youth to take an interest in their heritage in his 2006 songs "Hakka Hip-hop" (*Ke xiha* 客嘻哈) and "Study Hakka" (*Xue keijia* 學客家).[15] Fan Chiang of Kou Chou Ching has made considerable efforts to raise

[14] Dai Shiyao & Wanle julebu 戴士堯 & 玩樂俱樂部 [Dai Shiyao and Playa Club], *Dai Shiyao & Wanle julebu* 戴士堯 & 玩樂俱樂部 [Dai Shiyao and Playa Club], Himalaya Records, 2010, compact disc.

[15] Hsieh does not have a stable homepage, but several of his live performances are available for viewing on YouTube. See Hsieh Hsuan-chi 謝宣圻, "Ke xiha" 客嘻哈

awareness of Hakka language and culture through his musical activities, performing on Hakka television shows and sampling from recordings of both traditional Hakka eight-tone music (*Kejia bayin* 客家八音) and the contemporary folk-rock sounds of Hakka singer-songwriter Lin Sheng-xiang (林生祥). One audience member I spoke to at a 2009 Hakka cultural festival at which Kou Chou Ching performed told me she had little interest in rap music beyond the group. As a young person with a strong sense of Hakka identity, however, she explained that she found Fan Chiang's use of Hakka language and sounds "extremely moving" (*hen ganren* 很感人). She had even brought her grandfather to the performance in the hopes that he would enjoy hearing the Hakka language in a contemporary musical setting. When Kou Chou Ching took the stage and Fan Chiang asked audience members to put their hands in the air and pump their fists in a revolutionary fashion, she told me, he gladly obliged.

Mainlanders/*Waishengren*

In contrast to Hoklo and Hakka performers, Mainlanders are more or less invisible in the Taiwan rap scene. Surely there exist artists and audience members who hail from families that decamped to Taiwan following the Second World War, but MC Hotdog was one of only a few individuals I interviewed who voluntarily referred to a relative—his father—as a *waishengren*. Likewise, I am only aware of one song that deals explicitly with some aspect of the Mainlander experience: "His Story" (*Tade gushi* 他的

[Hakka hip-hop], video clip, accessed November 25, 2012, YouTube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBp0kdBkl9o; and "Xue kejia" 學客家 [Study Hakka], video clip, accessed November 25, 2012, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87ZEVV1eXCU.

故事), recorded in 2008 by amateur rapper Ma Xun 馬訓.[16] The piece interweaves recorded excerpts of an interview Ma conducted with his elderly father and rapped verses that chronicle the hardships endured by *waisheng* soldiers in Chiang Kai-shek's army. Through lyrics that highlight the sadness of separation from relatives on the Mainland and the trauma of physical injury incurred in the line of military duty, "His Story" asks listeners to empathize with the struggles of KMT servicemen who have often played the role of historical villains in post-martial law "narratives of Taiwan's unfolding."[17]

There are several possible explanations for the reluctance of artists and audiences to speak openly about any *waisheng* heritage they might have. Firstly, the majority of rap community members were born after 1975; as such, any *waishengren* in the scene would be Taiwan-born to the tune of two or three generations. Secondly, intermarriage among Mainlanders, Hoklo, and Hakka has been a commonplace on the island since at least the 1970s.[18] Given these circumstances, the *waishengren* designation as a marker of difference perhaps feels less salient for those coming of age today than it did for previous generations.[19] To this point, Ma Xun's "His Story" ends with a clip of his father's frail

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[16] Ma Xun 馬訓, "Tade gushi" 他的故事 [His story], 2008, music and lyrics archived online, accessed November 20, 2012, http://tw.streetvoice.com/music/kungfusuki/song/63593/.

[17] I borrow the phrase "narratives of Taiwan's unfolding" from Melissa Brown. See *Is Taiwan Chinese?: The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 19.

[18] A. Thornton, T. Fricke, L.S. Yang, and J.S. Chang "Theoretical Mechanisms of Family Change," in *Social Change and the Family in Taiwan*, ed. Arland Thornton and Hui-Sheng Lin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 111.

[19] The discourse about *waishengren* identity is still relatively new, but some scholars have begun to explore the subject. See, for example, Stéphane Corcuff, "Taiwan's 'Mainlanders,' New Taiwanese?" in *Memories of the Future: National Identity Issues*

voice asking, "So many years in Taiwan, we are all like a family…What else is there to say?"[20] Equally important is that rap music—particularly underground rap music—is strongly associated in numerous global contexts with what communication scholar Baruti N. Kopano has called the "rhetoric of resistance."[21] For Hoklo and Hakka communities on the island, "resistance" since the mid-twentieth century has often been configured in terms of opposition to the hegemony of the Mainlanders. This is not to suggest that *waishengren* rappers intentionally conceal their heritage, which would violate the imperative to keep it real, but perhaps that circumstances do not compel them to make their ethnicity an explicit feature of their performance. A casual conversation about the ethnic makeup of the scene with a longtime fan of local rap music, a Taipei resident in his early thirties who referred to himself as "Hoklo Taiwanese," lent credence to the latter theory. When I mentioned my surprise that so few had identified themselves in interviews as having *waisheng* heritage, the atmosphere chilled momentarily and he replied in no uncertain terms: "Maybe they just think it's none of your business."[22]

Aboriginal Peoples

The number of artists who identify themselves as members of Aboriginal communities is also small, and those who do are relatively peripheral to the scene. We

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and the Search for a New Taiwan, ed. Stéphane Corcuff (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 163-195.

[20] Ma, "His Story."

[21] Baruti N. Kopano, "Rap Music as an Extension of Black Rhetorical Tradition: 'Keepin' It Real,'" *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 204-214.

[22] Fieldnotes Journal, p.202, 11 August 2010.

might attribute this phenomenon to several factors beyond their overall minority status within the population. Most significantly, the rap community clusters around universities in major urban centers such as Taipei, Taizhong, Gaoxiong, and Tainan. Disproportionately poor and less likely than their Han counterparts to pursue post-secondary education, many Aborigines lack access to the institutions and social networks at the heart of the rap community.[23] Moreover, those who migrate to urban centers from Aboriginal communities often do so under economic duress and perhaps do not have the leisure time or financial resources to develop an interest in rap. Indeed, although hip-hop's earliest American pioneers hailed from impoverished inner-city communities, participating in the rap scene and making rap music in Taiwan today both require access to relatively costly technological resources: artists and audiences communicate with one another primarily through the online realm, and most performers own or have access to some production equipment or studio space. Personal computers and the Internet have made the dual process of recording and distributing music a more democratic pursuit than before, but musicians must still be able to meet a basic economic threshold to get in the game. Teacher Lin of the Tripoets, who is not of Aboriginal descent, speculated in a 2012 interview that rap simply hasn't attracted significant numbers of Aboriginal artists because they already "have a rich music tradition. If you talk about resistant music as a genre, there are tons of Aboriginal artists, talking about environmental issues, big

[23] For information on educational inequality in Taiwan's Aboriginal communities, see Cai Wenshan 蔡文山, "Cong jiaoyu jihui jundengde guandian xing si Taiwan yuanzhumin xueshengde jiaoyu xiankuang yu zhanwang" 從教育機會均等的觀點省思台灣原住民學生的教育現況與展望 [Reflections on the current condition and prospects of the education of Aboriginal students in Taiwan from the perspective of equality of educational opportunity], *Jiaoyu yu shehui yanjiu* 教育與社會研究 6 (Jan., 2004): 109-144.

corporations overdeveloping the environment, politicians not paying attention to the rural areas. But they use guitar, folk rock, those kinds of genres to tell their stories, not rap."[24]

Among the small number of Aboriginal rappers are Alilis, a member of the Tao tribe who collaborated with Kou Chou Ching on their 2009 track "Gray Coastlines" (*Huise haian* 灰色海岸),[25] and amateur MC Braindeath, one half of duo Psycho Piggz (*Shenjing zhu* 神經豬), who has released no albums but uses Internet sites like MySpace and Street Voice as a venue for songs like "My Root" (*Gen* 根), in which he reflects on racism within his mixed Hoklo-Taiya Aborigine family.[26] Only slightly better known are the Ti-Ho Brothers (*Tiehu xiongdi* 鐵虎兄弟, lit. "Iron Tiger Brothers"), who released their one, eponymous album in 2003.[27] The group comprised Jeff, a rapper and member of the Tao tribe who grew up on Orchid Island; Red-i, a reggae singer-guitarist and member of the Paiwan tribe who grew up in Central America and Canada before returning to Taiwan as an adult; and DJ Tai (DJ 鈦), a self-described "Han Taiwanese" born and raised in Taipei.[28] The Ti-Ho Brothers did not emerge from the core or long-term communities, but came together at the urging of 43 Zhang (*Zhang 43* 張四十三),

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[24] Teacher Lin 林老師, phone interview, 17 August 2012.

[25] Kou Chou Ching 拷秋勤 ft. Alilis, "Huise haian" 灰色海岸 [Grey coastlines], *Wuming yingxiong* 無名英雄 [Unsung heroes], independent release, 2009, compact disc.

[26] Shenjing zhu 神經豬 [Psycho Piggz], "Gen" 根 [My root], 2007, music and lyrics archived online, accessed November 20, 2012, http://tw.streetvoice.com/music/pow910166/song/14852.

[27] Ti-Ho Brothers 鐵虎兄弟, *Tiehu Xiongdi* 鐵虎兄弟 [Ti-Ho Brothers], Taiwan Colors Music, 2003, compact disc.

[28] DJ Tai DJ 鈦, personal interview, 26 January 2010.

the president of indie label Taiwan Colors Music (*Jiaotou yinyue* 角頭音樂). Zhang is well known in Taiwan for his commitment to local music and to Aboriginal artists in particular. The *Ti-Ho Brothers* album was the label's first foray into hip-hop, and the majority of its twelve tracks—including "Orchid Island Protest," "K.M.T. 1947," and "Formosa 2003"—reflect in their musical and literary texts on the specific social and political concerns of Aboriginal communities.

American-Born Taiwanese

Although they do not constitute a distinct ethnicity by any scientific measure, I suggest that a final group worth tying into this conversation about community demographics is American-born Taiwanese (ABTs). Comprising artists with Hoklo, Hakka, Mainlander, and Aboriginal heritage, ABTs overlap all the groups presented here so far. As explored in Part One, they were the earliest to find fame among local audiences; under the direction of producers Mi Chonghua and Luo Baiji (himself an ABT), the LA Boyz popularized rap music and hip-hop dance on the island during the early 1990s, paving the way for local artists The Party and Jutoupi. The craze for all things American peaked later in that decade, however, just as Taiwan began producing homegrown rap stars like MC Hotdog and Dog G. A small number of ABTs—including Boston-born Witness and, more recently, Queens-born Miss KO—continue to play prominent roles in the scene, but those I interviewed suggested that their American identities are more of a liability than an asset these days. As Witness put it: "There's this huge misconception that as long as you're American, American-born, you come here and you automatically get a record contract…The reason why it's there is because there used to be this group called the LA Boyz, who are now Machi, um, they were the three ABCs

[American-Born Chinese] that hit it big. So there was a time when ABCs were kind of hot, the hot thing, but that's kind of a disadvantage now."[29] Teacher Lin, not an ABT himself but a longtime scene insider, suggested that the waning fascination with ABT artists can be attributed to an increased valuation for all things local and an underlying ambivalence about the privilege that often attends foreign-born nationals: "Taiwanese people have complicated feelings towards ABTs. They represent wealth, they represent high status, a lot of them come from very wealthy families. At the same time, they don't speak our languages, or they try to but with a weird accent. The image is very different from what Taiwan is trying to present right now, which is more localized, more folk. So there's this tension."[30]

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Not all participants in the scene share this regard for the local or feel that rap is an appropriate venue for exploring Taiwan's complex ethnic identity politics. For example, Lin's partner in the Tripoets, rapper Ill Mo, explained that while he holds tremendous esteem for artists who foreground their specific ethnic affiliations or their personal senses of Taiwanese identity in performance, he does not feel compelled to take that approach himself:

> Good music is supposed to be good music, outside of ideology. Something that you can enjoy, rather than 'oh, I hear this, I hear that, therefore I hear Hakka, I hear Taiwanese experience, or I hear spirit…I don't want to exploit the fact that I'm Taiwanese, I'm this, I'm that. I'm an MC. I'm a hip-hop-loving enthusiast. So if you want to put any other things on top of that, that's fine. But let's go back to the *origin*, and that's not [about] who I am or

[29] Witness 黃崇旭, personal interview, 18 August 2010.

[30] Teacher Lin, personal interview.

anything else outside of the music.[31]

In his work for the Tripoets, Ill Mo makes no explicit attempts to draw attention to his status as a member of any particular group—ethnic or otherwise—beyond hip-hop's broader interpretive community. As if underlining this point, over the course of several interviews he made no indication of his ethnic affiliation, directly or by implication. Groups like Kou Chou Ching might posit rap as an extension of *liām-kua*, a fundamentally local practice, but when Ill Mo speaks of rap's origins, they are urban and African American—to make rap a platform for reflection on identity outside those parameters is simply not keeping it real.

Reflecting on Ethnic Identity Through Performance: Fan Chiang

I met Fan Chiang at 4:15pm on a grey Wednesday afternoon at a Starbucks near Dunhua South Road (*Dunhua nanlu* 敦化南路) in Taipei, on the garden level of the upscale Eslite Bookstore. It's a popular gathering spot in the Dongqu area of the city, teeming with chatty teenagers and college students with their faces buried deep in books and magazines. As I set up my digital recorder to capture our conversation, I feared that Fan Chiang's voice would disappear beneath the din of ceramic cups crashing into saucers, grinders crushing coffee beans, and Ella Fitzgerald's voice crooning "Let's Fall in Love" over the stereo. Fortunately, the MC speaks loudly and confidently, and—having spent numerous hours holed up in studios as one of the two frontmen for Kou Chou Ching—he knows how to make himself heard.

[31] Ill Mo 老莫, personal interview, 3 March 2010.

Dressed in slim-cut, dark-wash jeans, black sneakers, and a black t-shirt reading "Saint of Rock" in cursive, he had just come from a photo session—Saint of Rock, a local Taiwanese designer, had asked him to help promote their clothes and he was happy to oblige. It's not hard to imagine Fan Chiang as a model; although he's well under six-feet tall, a wiry frame, prominent jaw, and perpetually intense gaze make it difficult to avert your eyes from him either onstage or off. I was surprised when he told me he wanted to meet at Starbucks. I had expected him to pick a slightly less commercial venue, given his underground street cred and penchant for supporting independent Taiwanese business, but he seemed very comfortable in our environs. As he sat down to our outdoor table and pulled up a heavy wrought-iron garden chair, he revealed that one of many part-time jobs he had taken over the years to supplement his income from performing was at Starbucks, and he had spent a good amount of time at this one in particular.



Figure 2: Fan Chiang performing in Tainan, 27 September 2009. Photo courtesy of Kung Fu Entertainment.

Born in 1980 and raised in the Da-An (大安, "Great Peace") section of Taipei, he was still a student at Fu Jen Catholic University when he began collaborating with partner Fish Lin to form Kou Chou Ching.[32] They first encountered one another in 2003 at Lyricist Park, a weekly event held in a basketball court on Taipei's Shimin Boulevard where young rappers would get together to freestyle and battle in a manner modeled after the Eminem biopic *8 Mile*.[33] It was, in the words of other participants I interviewed, "pretty ghetto"—organizers Shortee of the Tripoets and Mr. Brown of rap-rock duo Da Ximen carried a boombox to supply the beats, which they had to wire to a motorcycle for power because batteries were too expensive. In spite of meager resources, Lyricist Park was something of a hotspot, and several Taipei-based fixtures of the underground scene cut their teeth there.

As the partnership with Fish Lin blossomed and Kou Chou Ching began to contemplate performing for money and recording an album,[34] Fan Chiang encountered resistance from his family: "The average Taiwanese person's point of view is you first study, graduate from college, then go to graduate school, then you go to work. And my doing this thing, in their eyes, it was just for fun. Just to play, not a real job." The lack of parental approval must have stung, but Fan Chiang says he had never felt particularly connected to his mother and father, nor to his two younger brothers. His paternal grandfather, who had been his primary caretaker, was a source of much-needed support.

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[32] Fan Chiang 范姜, personal interview, 7 April 2010. All quotations and factual information on this page through p.146 derive from the same interview.

[33] Shortee 小個 and Ill Mo 老莫, personal interview, 3 March 2010.

[34] Fish Lin and Fan Chiang also initially worked with a third MC, Jason Shu. They teamed up with DJ J-Chen, and instrumentalists Yobo and Achino, later.

He had for many years encouraged the budding MC to find ways of connecting to his Hakka roots, and he was absolutely overjoyed when his grandson expressed an interest in performing in the Hakka language and sampling from Hakka musics.

This, of course, required study, since Fan Chiang had grown up primarily speaking Mandarin rather than Hakka, and listened more to contemporary popular and western classical than traditional Taiwanese musics:

> From the time we were young, we never studied any local languages, I never studied my mother tongue…All that was studied in music class was western music, [sings] *do re mi fa sol la si do!* But Taiwan music doesn't use that system, it's totally different from western music...The teachers didn't bring us *gezaixi*, *nanguan*, or *beiguan* to listen to, but they'd teach Mozart. Beethoven. So from youth, we didn't understand…we thought *suona* is the thing you hear when someone dies. It's very noisy, it's the music of death. But the *suona* carries other meanings, and so does the *erhu*, even the *yueqin*. They have many different social significations. But the teachers don't teach it, and you don't know anything about their stories.

Becoming an MC has been a process of self-education for Fan Chiang, not just in the history and techniques not just of American hip-hop, but also in the many and varied Taiwanese linguistic and musical soundscapes that he had all but tuned out during his childhood. The double-reed woodwind instrument *suona* (嗩吶) is often played at funerals in Taiwan, and Hakka was a language only his aging grandfather had command of, but rap seemed to provide a framework for redeeming these modalities of expression and bringing them back into the realm of the young, the vital, the living. Energized by this mission, he and his partners in Kou Chou Ching—which eventually came to include two instrumentalists (Achino and Yobo) and DJ J-Chen—set about the task of improving

their command of local languages and began scouring night markets for recordings of traditional musics.

There is a strong didactic flavor to the group's songs, which are a patchwork of languages and samples from these found recordings, laid atop the sounds of globally circulating hip-hop beats and scratch effects. Fan Chiang becomes noticeably frustrated when he talks about what he perceives to be the limitations of local audiences, who sometimes complain to him that very few people speak Hakka and suggest that he perform in Mandarin instead. This strikes him as odd: "Language shouldn't present a problem in music," he thinks. "When people listen to Japanese or American hip-hop, like Dr. Dre and Eminem, they have to study the lyrics for comprehension—so why not Hakkanese?" He buries his head in his hands, too, when he speaks of their lack of awareness of Taiwan's past. He feels this is not their fault, but rather a direct result of growing up in an educational system that for many years failed to provide students with information about the island's history. Fan Chiang and Fish Lin are staunch advocates of Taiwan independence, something that they make very clear on stage. I followed Kou Chou Ching to shows in Singapore and Vancouver, and observed the group reiterating this point time and again to ethnically, nationally, and politically diverse audiences without fear of recrimination. In my interview with Fan Chiang, he drew a connection between the kind of work that Kou Chou Ching does and increasing awareness of the critical importance of safeguarding Taiwan's sovereignty: "If you don't know anything about our culture, history, geography, you have no way of knowing that this country *is* a country."

Within a few years of performing at all manner of venues—from live houses to Hakka cultural festivals to political events—the members of Kou Chou Ching finally started to make a name for themselves in the underground scene. After releasing their first full-length album in 2008, *Kou!! It's Coming Out!!!* (*Kao! Chu laile* 拷！出來了), the group was nominated for a Golden Melody Award, Taiwan's version of a Grammy. The outside validation helped Fan Chiang's parents to see their son's potential as a musician, and they began to feel more at ease about his financial prospects in the industry. In the midst of this happy season, however, Fan Chiang's grandfather passed away. The event prompted the rapper to do some soul-searching and to consider further how he might find more peace in his own life and in his relationship with his family. In his music, however, he continues to grapple with difficult issues and speak according to his conscience. Although Kou Chou Ching's vocal stance on Taiwan independence and insistence on exploring painful episodes in the island's history render the group vulnerable to accusations of disturbing the peace, Fan Chiang is unwavering in his commitment to rap as a platform for addressing social and political issues, and for exploring his own identity as a Hakka person. He told me, "We don't write to get everyone to feel the same way we do, but we hope that after reading the lyrics that listeners will try to challenge them. Then everyone can study together. Rise up and tell us your opinion."

The Demographics of Taiwan Rap: Gender

Across ethnic affiliations, rap music in Taiwan is made primarily by and for a community of men. With the exception of one artist—Miss KO, a relatively new Taiwanese-American transplant—I have encountered no professional female MCs on the

island, even though artists and fans have repeatedly insisted in interviews that one or two must exist somewhere, or at least did at some point in the past. Behind the scenes, rap



Figure 3: A predominantly male audience at a performance in Tainan, 27 September 2009. Photo by author.

presents itself as an essentially masculine pursuit; the studio and office spaces I visited in Taipei and Tainan were not only peopled with men, but also clearly marked as spaces for homosocial interaction by the presence of heterosexual male audience-based magazines, video game consoles, and copious cigarettes burnt down to tarry stubs.[35] Among audiences, the odd woman—often me—stood out conspicuously in vast fields of men. I

[35] According to a 2010 study, cigarette smoking is far more common among Taiwanese men (55-60%) than among women (3-4%). Chia-FangWu et al., "Second-Hand Smoke and Chronic Bronchitis in Taiwanese Women: A Health-Care Based Study," *BMC Public Health* 10 (2010): 1 (archived online at http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/10/44, accessed March 4, 2013). Likewise, a 2004 study indicated 69.53% of high school-age males play video games on a regular basis, compared to 30.47% of females. Chien Chou and Meng-Jung Tsai, "Gender Differences in Taiwan High School Students' Computer Game Playing," *Computers in Human Behavior* 23 (2007): 816.

was surprised to find that those with whom I spoke were perplexed by my interest in the Taiwan rap scene, not just because I am an American, not just because I am white—but because I am female.

Many noted in interviews that the lack of female participation in the scene is in step with the cultural norms of American hip-hop, gangsta rap in particular, which has often been characterized as a "sexist, homophobic and hyper-masculine genre"[36] that glorifies "patriarchal ways of thinking and behaving."[37] Gender ideologies in Taiwan rap are often expressed in terms of fidelity to these norms, as well as to the notion of "keeping it real," realized as an act of masculine agency that necessitates unambiguous and sometimes confrontational expressions of pain, pleasure, anger, and sexual desire. Beyond citing the influence of American hip-hop cultural practice, many performers also rationalize rap's gender practices in terms of a Confucian paradigm that posits women as reserved, refined, and introspective. Within this framework, women are not merely cast as physically and temperamentally unsuited to performing rap music, but also as fundamentally disinterested in the ugliness that often accompanies keeping it real.

The Politics of Gender in Taiwan: Cultural and Historical Contexts

Some broader cultural and historical context regarding the development of these ideas about gender is useful here. Although gendered cultural practices vary among and within Hoklo, Hakka, and Mainlander population groups, all have in common traditional

[36] Andreana Clay, "I Used to Be Scared of the Dick: Queer Women of Color and Hip Hop Masculinity," in *Home Girls Make Some Noise!: A Hip Hop Feminist Anthology*, ed. Gwendolyn D. Pough et al. (Mira Loma, CA: Parker Publishing, 2007), 153.

[37] bell hooks, "Gangsta Culture—Sexism, Misogyny: Who Will Take the Rap?" in *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representation* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 116. It is important to note that hooks also problematizes this view of rap music in this article.

values with origins in Confucian ethics. These date at least to the Spring and Autumn Period (770 - 476 B.C.E.) and have long nurtured a patriarchal society and attendant gendered kinship ideologies, relations, and practices. Some scholars have noted the binary pair of *nei* 內 (inside) and *wai* 外 (outside) as particularly important ordering concepts in Chinese conceptions of gender. As anthropologist Teri Silvio has put it: "Gender formations in Chinese societies are intimately linked to structures of interiority and exteriority, public and private, speaking and writing, thing and word. These oppositions are discursively gendered; they also structure the experience of living within sexed bodies and gendered identities."[38] Although originally "a spatial concept signifying the boundary between the inner, civic sphere of the imperial court and the military sphere of the outside world"[39] the *nei-wai* dyad, according to philosophy scholar Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, gradually emerged as a "functional distinction that defines the propriety of two gender spheres and the normative gender division of labor."[40] Following this paradigm, women are identified with interiority and the private; a traditional worldview dictates that their chief task after marrying out of their natal families is to maintain domestic harmony in their new homes and produce sons to sustain the male chain of descent. Men, by contrast, have been identified with exteriority and the public; they are charged with working outside the home and performing ancestral memorial rites.

Influenced by an emerging western feminist discourse, the women's movement

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[38] Teri Silvio, "Drag Melodrama/Feminine Public Sphere/Folk Television: 'Local Opera' and Identity in Taiwan" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1998), 23.

[39] Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, "*Neiwai*, Civility, and Gender Distinction," *Asian Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (Mar., 2004): 43.

[40] Ibid., 56.

gained traction on the island during the Japanese colonial period and inspired new challenges to traditional gender roles. The initiation of universal military service for young men in 1951 had a material impact on family processes, as it forced men to delay marriage and work until they fulfilled their obligations to the government.[41] As Taiwan transitioned from an agricultural to an industrial economy in the 1950s and 1960s, women began to assume additional responsibilities outside the home, first assisting with work on family farms and then going to labor in factories.[42] These changes, however, were born of economic expediency rather than ideological transformation; under the auspices of the KMT's New Life Movement (*xin shenghuo yundong* 新生活運動), Chiang Kai-shek and wife Soong May-ling strenuously promoted Confucian values on the island in an attempt to counter Communist ideology and strengthen cultural ties with the mainland.[43]

It was not until the 1970s that movements for gender and sexual equality got their second wind. In 1973, Annette Lu (*Lu Xiulian* 呂秀蓮) published her landmark *New Feminism* (*Xin nuxing zhuyi* 新女性主義). The book, initially censored by the KMT but today a cornerstone of women's studies curricula in Taiwan, reviews principles gleaned from western feminism and argues for their application on the island.[44] National Taiwan

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[41] Arland Thornton and Hui-Sheng Lin, *Social Change and the Family in Taiwan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 112.

[42] Ibid., 116-145.

[43] Ibid., 108. Teri Silvio also discusses the New Life Movement in "Drag Melodrama," 72-74.

[44] Murray A. Rubinstein, "Lu Hsiu-lien and the Origins of Taiwanese Feminism, 1944-1977," in *Women in the New Taiwan: Gender Roles and Gender Consciousness in a*

University inaugurated the Women's Research Program in 1985; similar departments at National Tsing-hua University and National Cheng-kung University soon followed.[45] Gradually, these institutions have widened their purview from women's studies to include gender and sexuality as broader categories of inquiry: following the emergence of the gay and lesbian/queer (*tongzhi* 同志) movement during the 1990s, National Central University established the Centre for the Study of Sexualities (*Xing/bie Yanjiushi* 性／別研究室) in 1995.[46]

Since the end of the martial law period, the government has made efforts to enact policies that promote gender parity in education and employment, and, more recently, that criminalize discrimination based on sexual orientation.[47] Women also now occupy a number of important political positions on the island—Annette Lu served as vice president from 2000 to 2008 under Chen Shuibian, and the Democratic Progressive Party was under the leadership of Tsai Ing-wen (*Cai Yingwen* 蔡英文) from 2008 to 2012. In spite of these changes, Taiwan in many ways remains a patriarchal society with deeply ingrained Confucian values. Although the female labor participation rate reached

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Changing Society, ed. Catherine S.P. Farris, Anru Lee, and Murray Rubinstein (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 252.

[45] Catherine S.P. Farris, Anru Lee, and Murray Rubinstein, "Introduction," in *Women in the New Taiwan*, viii.

[46] Hans Tao-Ming Huang, *Queer Politics and Sexual Modernity in Taiwan* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press: 2011), 20.

[47] "Worker Anti-Discrimination Bill Passes," *China Post*, May 5, 2007, accessed March 4, 2013, http://www.chinapost.com.tw/news/archives/taiwan/200755/108825.htm.

approximately forty-four percent in 2009,[48] women remain underpaid relative to their male colleagues and pursue advanced degrees and executive management positions at significantly lower rates.[49] The gay and lesbian/queer movement likewise continues to make strides even as the *tongzhi* lifestyle remains a strong social taboo.

Comparing Gender Performance in Mandopop and Rap

Musical and theatrical performance have long served as spaces in which a range of gender roles, enforcing or transgressing the traditional *nei-wai* binary construction, are assumed and enacted on the island. Most notably, sensitive and effete males, fashionably dressed and impeccably coiffed, are durable fixtures of Mandopop. Contemporary artists like Jam Hsiao (*Xiao Jingteng* 蕭敬騰) and Wilber Pan (*Pan Weibo* 潘瑋柏) are frequently characterized as *wenrou* (溫柔), a term that glosses to the English "tender" but that "denotes characteristics of being caring, sensitive, and, when describing men, fairly androgynous."[50] The *wenrou* male is sentimental and emotional, unafraid to seem vulnerable performing his lovesickness and longing to mass audiences. Anthropologist Marc Moskowitz observes that, while this brand of "effeminate masculinity" might carry a stigma in the U.S., "the *wenrou* male is seen as an ideal in Taiwan, and in many ways it

[48] "Women and Men in R.O.C. (Taiwan): Facts and Figures, Version 2011," Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, accessed March 4, 2013, http://eng.stat.gov.tw/public/Data/2191019571.pdf.

[49] Pat Gao, "Toward a New Female Future," *Taiwan Review*, June 1, 2010, accessed March 4, 2013, http://taiwanreview.nat.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=102738&CtNode=1359. Also see Chiayi Ho, "Taiwan Remains on Slow Road to Gender Equality," *Taiwan Today*, March 26, 2010, accessed March 4, 2013, http://www.taiwantoday.tw/ct.asp?xItem=96865&CtNode=428.

[50] Marc L. Moskowitz, *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and its Cultural Connotations* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 89.

is a far more common version of manhood than other models among the middle and upper class."[51] We will return to the subject of gender as interlocked with class distinctions later, but for now let it stand that being "effeminate" does not necessarily preclude being "male" in the Mandopop milieu, nor does it necessarily point to a non-heterosexual orientation. Although Moskowitz views this flexibility—or perhaps ambivalence—toward gender as a distinctly modern challenge to traditional modes of patriarchy in Taiwan, Nancy Guy points out that "the most popular roles (typically performed by women) in Taiwanese opera (*gezaixi*) are those of effeminate and often tender young men."[52] By this logic, Mandopop is not an anomaly among musico-dramatic forms; similarly pliable representations of masculinity have been a commonplace in Chinese opera for centuries.

If the embrace of the *wenrou* male suggests that there is some leeway about the performance of masculinity in popular music, the enduring presence of the *wenrou* female in Mandopop reassures us that this flexibility is not exactly bidirectional. Almost without exception, Mandopop women, exemplified by the legendary Teresa Teng (*Deng Lijun* 鄧麗君), are emphatically feminine: slim, pale, and sweet-voiced. J-pop and K-pop-inspired girl groups like S.H.E. and Fahrenheit pushed this formula even further during the first decade of the 2000s, with their performances of what Ian Condry has termed "cutismo" in the Japanese context—exaggerated cuteness, innocence, and hyper-

[51] Ibid.

[52] Nancy Guy, review of *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and its Cultural Connotations*, by Marc L. Moskowitz, *Perfect Beat* 12, no. 2 (2011): 193.

femininity.[53] It has only been in recent years that some women performers have adopted harder sounds and less precious public images. In 2009, megastar A-mei (阿妹) unveiled her alter-ego Amit (*A-Mite* 阿密特), a tough-as-nails feminist whose music takes on controversial issues such as suicide and homosexuality, not traditionally the domain of male *or* female Mandopop performers.[54] Other hard-rocking women, such as bassist Doris Yeh of the black metal group Chthonic, have also carved out a space for themselves in indie music on the island.

Rap, however, is one arena in which Confucian gender ideologies are rigidly interpreted and religiously observed. This is not to say that women are actively and intentionally excluded from the scene by men, but that their silence is often explained in terms of innate gendered preferences. In her work on women in the male-dominated Syrian Jewish hymn tradition known as the *pizmonim*, Kay Kaufman Shelemay argues that excavating women's silence can engender a "fuller understanding of power relations within that tradition."[55] Taiwanese women are not prohibited by doctrine from performing rap music, but their absence from the scene does likewise betray the enduring

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[53] Ian Condry, "Women Rappers and the Price of Cutismo," in *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 165.

[54] While she is strongly identified with Mandopop, A-mei's Aboriginal heritage is well known to fans. Her performance as "Amit" references her given Puyuma name, "Gulilai Amit." Ethnomusicologist Kuan Yuan-Yu has proposed an understanding of Amit's rejection of female Mandopop gender stereotypes as emerging from her identity as Puyuma, a traditionally matrilineal, matrilocal people. Kuan Yuan-Yu, "Chang Hui-Mei's Fusion Music and Matriarchal Cultural Resistance in Contemporary Taiwan" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, November 16-20, 2011).

[55] Kay Kaufman Shelemay, "The Power of Silent Voices: Women in the Syrian Jewish Musical Tradition," in *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*, ed. Laudan Nooshin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 269.

power of Confucian gender doxa on the island. In Dog G's words:

> Taiwanese women are relatively traditional, and most don't really want to be like men. Because in Taiwan, after all, men are more outside [*wai* 外] and women are more inside [*nei* 內]; women are more sensitive. Another thing is that everyone thinks rap has a lot of foul language, expresses dissatisfaction, and speaks about relatively low and dirty things. So women are under the impression that it's like this, and they don't want to perform.[56]

Dog G makes recourse to the *nei-wai* binary in explaining the absence of women, but he also suggests that they have some agency in the matter: profanity and expressions of dissent are the province of men, and unless women are open to assimilating masculine norms, rap music holds little appeal.[57] Of course, the question of agency here is slippery, as feminist scholars like Sherry Ortner remind us that patriarchal structures are apt to construct gendered subjects that in turn reproduce patriarchal structures.[58] Nevertheless, artist after artist cited the same reasons for the lack of female participation in rap. Even Taipei-based DJ Noodles, who holds the distinction of having been the first female DMC world championship finalist in 2006, felt strongly that rap is dominated by men because it has little to offer women: "Women find these matters boring. There's no enjoyment in it

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[56] Dog G 大支, personal interview, 26 September 2010.

[57] The notion that women are reluctant to use profane language has, perhaps unsurprisingly, some cross-cultural currency. Writing about country music, for example, Aaron Fox has also noted that "women are characterized in local linguistic ideology as less inclined (or licenced) to use profanity, and this appears to be statistically true in practice." Aaron Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 260.

[58] Sherry B. Ortner, *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 17.

for them."[59]

Implicit in these accounts of gender asymmetry in the scene are specific notions of the narrative themes and expressive modes that ought to be invoked in the performance of rap music, and a sense that such "low and dirty things" lie outside the realm of female experience or interest. Moreover, interviewees posited specific *sonic* attributes as congruent with rap's thematic masculinity, especially forcefulness and loudness. At least two of the most celebrated voices in Taiwan rap, MC Hotdog's and Dog G's, are frequently described as textured (*zhigande* 質感的) or gravelly (*shaya* 沙啞), and powerful (*youli* 有力). Women are excluded from the rap sphere at least in part because, cast as fragile and genteel, they are assumed less capable of producing these kinds of sounds than men. Of this matter, DJ Noodles opined: "For women, if you want to use rap techniques to express something besides just the meaning of the lyrics, well, it's not easy to make something that sounds good. I think many people try to listen to recordings by women and think, 'Oh, I give up.' Because it's very difficult to use a woman's vocal tone to rap…it's hard to do it with power." By "woman's vocal tone," Noodles gestures towards a form of habitus and style of communication prevalent among young, unmarried women in Taiwan known as *sajiao* (撒嬌), which indicates a kind of petulant or childlike coquetry. *Sajiao* is associated with very particular sounds and speech patterns, including nasalization and the use of prolonged sentence-final particles, which result "in a

[59] DJ Noodles, personal interview, 6 February 2010. Noodles actually identifies as a lesbian, one that might be further designated a "T," or "tomboy," as opposed to a "P," or *po* 婆, "matron" or "woman," according to the social categorizations of Taiwan's lesbian community. During the course of our interview, several other male DJs present in the room referred to her as "just like a man," a description that she did not deny.

distinctively whiny sound."[60] The feminine lilt of *sajiao* opposes the masculine growl of rap; its pervasiveness as a socially acceptable mode of speaking compels women to become singers or dancers, undertakings in which Noodles suggested they are more evenly matched with men, rather than rappers.[61] It is perhaps for this reason that on the rare occasion that female voices do surface in rap songs, they deliver choruses rather than punchlines.[62]

The characterization of Taiwanese women as disinterested in rap music and lacking the physical constitution necessary for powerful performance is often expressed in terms of their inability to "keep it real." DJ Mr. Gin, one of Dog G's colleagues from Tainan, told me:

> Hip-hop stuff, it's about life, the lyrics record your life or somebody else's life. You're telling a story, so you want to use appropriately realistic language and let other people know that this song, its lyrics, they express strong things. Maybe some words need to be different for men and women…There's a female group who rap in Gaoxiong, called Candy Box or Toy Box or something, but what they do sounds more like *shulaibao*. When women rap there's less of a sense of realism, it's more refined. Hip-hop

[60] Tzu-i Chuang, "The Power of Cuteness: Female Infantilization in Urban Taiwan," *Greater China* (Summer 2005): 22.

[61] Folklore scholars Lisa Gilman and John Fenn observe a similar phenomenon at work in the rap and ragga scenes in Malawi, where women participate far more frequently as dancers than as rappers. See "Dance, Gender, and Popular Music in Malawi: The Case of Rap and Ragga," *Popular Music* 25, no. 3 (Oct., 2006): 369-381.

[62] Musicologist Leonhard Kreuzer notes that women typically sing rather than rap in American hip-hop, as well: "The question could be raised whether or not, within the production and reception conventions of (gangsta) rap music, rap is coded male and singing female. If that is the case, the occurrence of a male singing track is already both a genre and gender transgression, one that is mirrored here on the textual level by the contrast of fear and certainty." See "'Aiming at a Mirror': Towards a Critique of Gangsta Masculinity," in *Dichotonies: Gender and Music*, ed. Beate Neumeier (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter 2009), 210.

> should be pissed off, but they're so refined…they just can't express that kind of stuff.

Mr. Gin suggests that realism—keeping it real—is an important quality of rap storytelling in the hip-hop tradition, and that emoting "strong things" and being "pissed off" are critical to that process. Although he could not recall with certainty the name of the group from Gaoxiong, the terms he summoned ("candy" and "toy") clearly impart a sense not of strength, but of sweetness and childlike innocence—anathema to one who associates rap music with roughness and rebellion. Also of note is Gin's reference to *shulaibao*, which in this context suggests that women lack the sense of flow required to rap, and that their approach to performance therefore recalls not hip-hop but the more "refined" traditional narrative arts.[63]

In light of these assumptions, Taiwan rap would not appear to advance a particularly progressive agenda vis-à-vis gender. Jutoupi's flirtations with cross-dressing and occasional invocation of female vocal registers and perspectives notwithstanding, rappers have been more or less resistant to the interpellation of both feminist and queer politics that gained traction on the island in the 1990s and 2000s. Moreover, their uncritical subscription to Confucian gender discourses—linchpins of the KMT's nation-building and sinicization projects during the period of martial law—renders rap vulnerable to critique as an essentially conservative, or at least non-oppositional, genre. Nevertheless, even as we consider women's absence from the scene, a rigorous discussion of gender must also take account of men's *presence*: acknowledging how rap creates spaces for male sociality, avenues for male self-empowerment, and opportunities

[63] I explore more fully the relationship of *shulaibao* to rap in Part Three.

for the articulation of multiple masculine identities is key to understanding how the music is rendered meaningful to its practitioners. In Part Three, I explore further how the music and the community have been durable outlets for expressions of male subjectivity during a period of tremendous social and political transformation on the island.

The Demographics of Taiwan Rap: Socioeconomic Status

Although American rap has historically been associated with poverty and the marginalized space of the urban ghetto, rap in non-American contexts has often been the province of those with greater socioeconomic advantage.[64] From Spain to Senegal, it is individuals who have the greatest access to communications technologies, especially the Internet, who are most able to learn about rap history and techniques. My experiences during fieldwork strongly suggested that this is also the case in Taiwan: community members overwhelmingly represent the island's middle class, and most grew up in financially stable homes and have had or are pursuing some form of higher education. They do not hail from places that resemble the crumbling ghetto of American rap renown but reside mostly in the comfortable, compact dwellings that are stacked within urban Taiwan's numerous ramshackle, mid-rise apartment buildings.

The socioeconomic character of Taiwan's rap scene is on clear display at performances, especially in the more affluent north of the island. Circulating among the crowd at an MC Hotdog concert in Taipei in May 2011, I observed that approximately fifty percent of the audience documented the event with high-end DSLR cameras. I had

[64] In "A Capsule History of African Rap," Eric Charry writes that while rap has now taken root in a wide variety of communities on the African continent, it was "initially only an elite Westernized segment of African youth that embraced rap." See *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World*, ed. Eric Charry (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 3.

hoped to be able to capture high-quality images and video recordings with an older point-and-shoot, but nothing my little camera produced could compare to what those in attendance posted to blogs, social networking sites, and Youtube the day after the performance. Having explored the possibility of purchasing new equipment before embarking on my fieldwork, I knew very well that the Canons and Nikons and Sonys sprinkled throughout the audience that day cost anywhere from US$500 to $1500 with just the most basic interchangeable lenses included. Likewise, the data phones many used to record the proceedings were bound to have cost at least a few hundred dollars more. More than just tools for capturing the sights and sounds of MC Hotdog's show, they were marquee forms of conspicuous consumption, clear indications of their owners' flexible financial priorities.



Figure 4: Audience members at an MC Hotdog show recording the performance on their data phones, 21 May 2011. Photo by author.

As I conducted interviews with participants in the rap scene, I quickly gleaned that these technological tools are part and parcel of middle-class lifestyles for young urbanites on the island. Indeed, the artists and audiences I spoke to painted remarkably consistent pictures of lives in which their basic needs for food, shelter, and medical care during childhood and young adulthood were met, with enough left over for limited travel and creature comforts. In some cases they reported maintaining their lifestyles independently, but a recently sluggish economy and stagnating wages mean that most rely heavily on financial assistance from relatives to meet the high cost of living in cities like Taipei. Although a few claimed working-class backgrounds, the majority described childhoods in households headed by elementary and secondary school teachers, professors, office workers, nurses, construction supervisors, insurance brokers, and small business owners. Born mostly between 1975 and 1990, they crested the wave of the Taiwan Economic Miracle and were the beneficiaries of both unprecedented parental investment and an expanded, island-wide university system.

Economic Growth and the Taiwan Miracle

Before I proceed, some more detailed historical context is useful for understanding how members of the rap community fit into the broader socioeconomic landscape of Taiwan. The "middle class" to which I refer here is a relatively new phenomenon on the island, born of a series of transformations in Taiwan's economy over the last six decades that are often referred to as the Taiwan Economic Miracle (*Taiwan jingji qiji* 台灣經濟奇蹟). The years immediately following the Second World War saw tremendous economic and political instability as Taiwan transitioned from colony of Japan to seat of the Republic of China, a period marked by hyperinflation and widespread

civil unrest that culminated in the 2-28 Incident. By the 1950s, however, the KMT had consolidated its power through the imposition of martial law, which created the requisite stability for the island to rebuild and reform its fragile economy. In this endeavor, Chiang Kai-shek received significant financial support from the United States, which commenced a strategic partnership with Taiwan following China's entry into the Korean War. With essentially unchecked power and an influx of cash, the KMT instituted land, industrial, and educational reforms at an unprecedented scale to vastly accelerate economic development.

The early 1960s were characterized by a transition from agrarian to industrial economy as the island began to export non-agricultural goods to other countries. The following years saw exponential export-led growth as the KMT opened Taiwan's economy to international competition, adjusted the tax laws, decreased regulation, encouraged foreign investment, and developed the island's infrastructure and heavy industries. In the 1980s and 1990s, the rate of economic growth slowed and the island began a process of de-industrialization, spurred in part by rising labor costs and increasing pressure to move manufacturing offshore to more profitable venues. At the same time, however, Taiwan established itself as a premier source for high-tech electronics, taking a leading role in the global production of semi-conductors and computers. The government gradually loosened restrictions on cross-Strait business during this period as well, setting the stage for Taiwanese companies to invest directly in China, which was still at a much earlier stage in the process of industrialization and therefore a cheaper source of labor. Standards of living rose and income inequality decreased further, helping to push life expectancy from 59 years in the 1950s to 72 years

in 1983, and tripling the size of the average living space.[65] The transition from agrarian to industrial economy predictably saw a significant movement of the population from rural to urban areas, as more workers sought jobs in non-farming capacities.[66]

In addition to land reforms and shifting economic policies, new initiatives in education dramatically transformed the picture of Taiwanese life from 1950 to 2000. With the institution of compulsory primary education in the 1950s, subsequently lengthened from six to nine years in 1968, literacy rates climbed, supporting the growth of an educated workforce.[67] This same period saw an explosion in the number and accessibility of institutions of higher learning. During the Japanese colonial period, Taipei Imperial University (now National Taiwan University) was the island's only university, but by 1969, there were 91 institutions of higher learning of which 22 were universities or four-year colleges and 69 were junior colleges.[68] In 2000, on a landmass that is roughly the size of Maryland and Delaware combined, there were 127 universities and four-year colleges and 23 junior colleges.[69]

In the past decade and a half, Taiwan's economy has matured and growth has slowed, giving rise to new anxieties about the future. Although the economy rebounded following both the 2000 dot-com collapse and the 2008 global financial crisis, there is

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[65] Cal Clark and Alexander C. Tan, *Taiwan's Political Economy: Meeting Challenges, Pursuing Progress* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012), 25.

[66] Jack F. Williams, "Vulnerability and Change in Chinese Agriculture," in *The Other Taiwan*, ed. Murray A. Rubinstein (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 218-219; 245.

[67] Clark and Tan, *Taiwan's Political Economy,* 11-12.

[68] Ru-jer Wang, "From Elitism to Mass Higher Education in Taiwan: The Problems Faced," *Higher Education* 46, no. 3 (Oct., 2003): 261-262.

[69] Ibid., 266.

still widespread concern about the island's financial outlook, as indicated in the proliferation of both local and foreign newspaper articles with titles like "Taiwan Searches For New Formula For Economic Success"[70] and "Is Taiwan's Economic Miracle Fading Away?"[71] Driving these sentiments are fears that the economy has become "boxed in," too expensive for the lower-end economic sectors, but not quite up to the task of competing with more advanced economies in industries like banking and biotechnology.[72] Taiwan's increasing economic integration with China has also been accompanied by worries about the future of the island's sovereignty. As the economic relationship between the two polities becomes more intricate and Taiwan's dependence on Chinese economic growth increases, questions are bound to emerge regarding the ability of the Taiwan government to advocate for its citizens in the face of economic sanctions, for example.

Current participants in the rap scene came of age when the middle class was already firmly established and entrenched in Taiwan. Their growing-up experiences bore little resemblance to their parents' and their grandparents', who remember a time when Taiwan was still primarily agrarian, children were expected to contribute to the family business, and educational opportunities were sharply circumscribed by the small number of institutions of higher learning on the island. By contrast, artists and audiences I

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[70] Cindy Sui, "Taiwan Searches For New Formula For Economic Success," *BBC News*, October 9, 2011, accessed March 5, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-15178296.

[71] "Talk of the Day: Is Taiwan's Economic Miracle Fading Away?" *Focus Taiwan News Channel*, June 18, 2012, accessed March 5, 2013, http://focustaiwan.tw/ShowNews/WebNews_Detail.aspx?ID=201206180045&Type=aTOD.

[72] Clark and Tan, *Taiwan's Political Economy*, 84.

interviewed, particularly those born in urban areas in the 1990s, grew up in a post-agrarian Taiwan, where their primary responsibility during youth was to excel at academics and matriculate to the best possible universities. They had access to universal health care, highly developed systems of mass rapid transit, and global mass media. In adulthood, however, they face challenges that members of their parents' and grandparents' generations did not, namely, the perils of greater economic integration with China and the unceremonious cooling of a once white-hot economy. In the following pages, I examine in more detail socioeconomic representation within the rap community, with particular attention to educational attainments and current means of economic self-support. Through this, I hope to shed light on rap in Taiwan as a largely middle-class music, arising not from conditions of urban poverty like its American forebear, but from relative—if not excessive—privilege.

Family and Educational Backgrounds

Historically, the intensely hierarchical nature of Taiwan's educational institutions has limited intergenerational social mobility in Taiwan.[73] Wealthier families living in affluent parts of the island are more able to prepare their children for enrollment in prestigious primary schools, which is a necessary precondition for admission to prestigious high schools and then universities, which lead more or less directly to the most desirable jobs.[74] Since parental educational and professional attainments serve as a

[73] Hong-zen Wang, "Ethnicized Social Mobility in Taiwan: Mobility Patterns Among Owners of Small- and Medium-Scale Businesses," *Modern China* 27, no. 3 (July, 2001): 360.

[74] For more on the ways in which household wealth correlates to educational attainment and ultimately job placement see Hung Chih-Cheng and Cheng Sheng Yao, "Access and Equity: Who Are the Students at Taiwan's Top Universities?" in *Inequality in Education:*

strong predictor for their children's ability to access future educational and professional opportunities, I was curious about the kinds of families from which participants in the rap scene emerged. Generally speaking, the parents of artists and audiences I interviewed are, or were, employed in middle-income, white-collar professions, with particularly strong representation in the educational sector. Teacher Lin and Shortee of the Tripoets, Chang Jui-chuan, RPG, Dog G, and Mr. Brown, among others, all had at least one parent who was a teacher or college professor. Others in the scene spoke of mothers who were secretaries and nurses, and fathers who worked as construction supervisors, insurance salesmen, computer programmers, and small business owners. Nearly everyone I interviewed emphasized their parents' commitment to education and the strong—sometimes suffocating—encouragement they received to succeed in Taiwan's cutthroat school system. Some of them struggled, failing high school or getting expelled from college, but the majority managed to perform well, and many have advanced degrees.

"In Taiwan, we have so many Ph.D. rappers!" MC Ill Mo exclaimed as we bonded over our shared experiences of graduate school in an interview at a McDonald's by the Guting MRT station, on the eve of the 2010 Lunar New Year.[75] It was something I had already noticed myself—when I set up meetings with community members and explained my project, they seemed in many cases to be familiar, and indeed conversant, in the task of writing a thesis. Ill Mo, after receiving an MA from the Chinese Culture University (*Zhongguo wenhua daxue* 中國文化大學) with a thesis on Spike Lee's 2000

Comparative and International Perspectives, Vol. 24, ed. Donald B. Holsinger and W. James Jacob (Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, 2009): 290-306.

[75] Ill Mo 老莫, personal interview, 12 February 2010.

film *Bamboozled*, explained that he was now completing coursework towards the Ph.D. in English Literature at Tamkang University (*Danjiang daxue* 淡江大學). Similarly, his partner in the Tripoets, Teacher Lin, was preparing to depart for fieldwork in Fiji. A Doctoral Candidate in Anthropology at the University of Pittsburgh, he is currently at work on a dissertation that explores the effects of the environmental movement on traditional Fijian fishing practices. Lin's not in Taiwan very often these days, which has made recording and performing something of a challenge for the group. They're not alone in trying to balance musical activities with academic pursuits, however—at the time I conducted my fieldwork, rapper Chang Jui-chuan was pursuing a doctorate in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages); Fish Lin was writing a thesis for his master's degree in Architectural Preservation; and amateur performer Braindeath of the Psycho Piggz was in the process of obtaining his MD. Others in the scene have bachelor's degrees in business administration, engineering, physical education, and graphic design. The academic credentials of the younger generation of artists and audiences are similarly distinguished, a significant proportion of them attending the island's top universities and most prestigious high schools.

The intersection of rap and higher education in Taiwan is not coincidental. The rates of university attendance on the island as a whole are high, but in addition, many members of the rap community were first exposed to the music within the university system. As I will discuss later in this chapter, Teacher Lin and an older classmate established the extracurricular Hip-Hop Culture Research Society (*Taida xiha wenhua yanjiu shehui* 台大嘻哈文化研究社會) at National Taiwan University, the island's premier public college. That group inspired similar organizations at other schools,

including Taipei National University of the Arts (*Guoli Taibei yishu daxue* 國立台北藝術大學) and National Chengchi University (*Guoli zhengzhi daxue* 國立政治大學). These groups serve as incubators for future musicians, spaces in which to study the techniques and history of rap, to build relationships with other members of the community, and to demonstrate promise as a performer.

Making Ends Meet: The Economics of Taiwan Rap

Taiwan's rappers take their educations and non-musical professional training seriously because most understand that even a successful rap career will in all likelihood not sustain them financially. Rap music is, and will remain for the foreseeable future, a firmly underground phenomenon with little potential for major label investment. This is not to suggest that rap music has no audience, but either that the audience to date has not been sizable enough to pique the interest of the island's embattled mainstream record companies, or that these companies have yet to produce an act that piques the interest of audiences. Producer Jim Lee—who has worked with numerous top-selling pop stars on the island, including Wang Leehom, Stanley Huang (formerly of the LA Boyz), A-Mei, and David Tao—explained to me in a 2010 interview that sluggish record industry sales are primarily to blame for this state of affairs: "First of all, I think record companies are not willing to invest in *anybody* [Mandopop or otherwise]. And secondly, there's so little return in rap."[76] Indeed, early efforts to gauge interest in rap in the larger Taiwan market were traumatic for label executives and deterred them from making further forays into hip-hop. A cautionary tale I heard several times was that of the label Alfa Music, which

[76] Jim Lee, personal interview, 5 November 2010.

attempted to develop a gangsta rap-style group called Iron Bamboo (*Tie zhutang* 鐵竹堂) in the early 2000s and lost millions of dollars in the process. As Ill Mo explained:

> [Iron Bamboo was] a test by the major labels to test out the water of the hip-hop market, to see what happens…but their sales flopped…and it scared the shit out of all these major labels and they were like 'no more hip-hop for us,' basically. That's their mentality, because they put out two million, three million, five million, just to make it happen. Iron Bamboo, they shot their music video in the States, in LA, and basically it was like a mini movie, a twenty-minute movie. All this huge money put into promotion and nothing happened, they never made it actually. So [the record companies] decided to let go for a while.[77]

It bears noting that Iron Bamboo did not emerge from the underground the way that MC Hotdog or Dog G had, and they did not slowly grow a fan base over a period of years. They were instead brought together by Alfa Music producer Michael Lin (*Lin Maike* 林邁克), an American of mixed Swedish and Korean heritage, who became part of the group himself. Like the LA Boyz and The Party before them, Iron Bamboo did not write much of their own material, but relied on the assistance of hit-makers like Jay Chou's songwriting partner Fang Wen-shan. A formula that worked during the early 90s, however, hit a sour note after the turn of the millennium: audiences simply did not buy the group's hollow claims to "gangsta" authenticity and refused to buy the record.[78]

Increasing economic integration with China and a general sense that mainland audiences lack interest in the genre, especially in its non-Mandarin incarnations, further complicates the picture for labels. Taiwan's rappers, responding to the imperative to keep it real, frequently employ profane language, and many engage political themes in

[77] Ill Mo, personal interview.

[78] Ibid.

their work, making the music a tough sell in the heavily regulated mainland market. Those who hold out hopes of crossing over are obligated to keep it clean and hold their tongues with regards to politics. Whereas artists once feared reprisal from the KMT for speaking out about politically sensitive or taboo subjects, self-censorship is these days a much more common occurrence. As Chang Jui-chuan remarked: "It's more like people or artists are censoring themselves because of the market, the Chinese market…so they avoid talking about certain issues. They would do that to themselves. I don't think the government does that anymore. Now you don't see it, but it's there. People choose to do that themselves."[79]

It's a bitter pill to swallow for some musicians, as Ill Mo put it:

> When I first got into this hip-hop thing, started writing songs and forming a group…I had this dream of becoming a rap star that actually supports my living. But very soon the dream was shattered. I learned that there's no way that you can make it. The prime example is MC Hotdog. He's like the biggest rap star you can find in Taiwan, but he's

[79] Chang Jui-chuan 張睿銓, personal interview, 3 December 2009. In an article exploring pop star A-mei's performance of the "Republic of China National Anthem" at the 2000 presidential inauguration of Chen Shui-bian, Nancy Guy gives an account of the social, political, and economic pressures that can give rise to self-censorship among Taiwanese performers. Following A-mei's delivery of the anthem, the singer faced a number of repercussions from authorities across the Strait who branded her a supporter of Taiwan independence. Guy writes that the CCP's "Propaganda Department ordered China's state-owned television and radio stations as well as newspapers to halt the dissemination of advertisement featuring the Taiwanese star for the soft-drink Sprite. Owners of huge outdoor billboards were also instructed to take down A-mei's ads. As the ban went into effect, A-mei's image vanished from billboards in Beijing, Shanghai and other cities and was replaced with plain Coca-Cola and Sprite ads…In addition to banning her Sprite advertisements, A-mei was also forbidden to enter mainland China for three years." Faced with these kinds of consequences, many Taiwanese artists who desire to enter the mainland market are discouraged to do or say anything that might be interpreted as pro-Taiwan, anti-China, or in any way otherwise politically incendiary. "'Republic of China National Anthem' on Taiwan: One Anthem, One Performance, Multiple Realities," *Ethnomusicology* 46, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 104.

> not driving a Cadillac or buying huge houses. He's doing maybe a little bit better than normal people, he's getting paid for what he loves to do, but that's about it. And that's not really a stable living condition…So that's all in the past.[80]

Ill Mo and his partners in the Tripoets explained that all their earnings come from performances, as record sales generate virtually no profits. Prior to signing with indie label True Color, they typically commanded between NT$3,000 and $5,000 (approximately US$90 to $150) for a ten- to fifteen-minute set. Their management now negotiates financial matters for the group, but even so, Ill Mo believes their fees hover around NT$10,000 to $15,000 (approximately US$300 to $450), and only a portion of that actually goes to the group after various fees and expenses are paid.[81] Many artists I interviewed also spoke of being swindled out of profits by unscrupulous record executives and managers. Between lack of interest from mainstream labels, low fees, and hucksters, it is virtually impossible to make rap a lucrative vocation on the island.

They might come from relatively privileged socioeconomic backgrounds, but there are no mega-moguls, no Jay-Z or Kanye-type figures, in the Taiwan scene. MC Hotdog and Dog G are perhaps the only artists who are able to support themselves through their performance and recording activities, and even then one notices a conspicuous lack of bling on their persons. Other artists in the scene must take on full or part-time work to make ends meet, but almost without exception they still live at home with parents because the cost of real estate in Taiwan's major urban areas is beyond what they can earn. In some cases, artists are able to find employment in music-related

[80] Ill Mo, personal interview.

[81] Ibid.

businesses, working as recording engineers, studio assistants, and even record shop owners. Taiwanese-American rapper Witness (*Huang Chongxu* 黃崇旭), who lives in Taipei, teaches English through rap at a private enrichment school for children. For the most part, however, musicians maintain professional profiles that are more or less independent of their identities as MCs: Chang Jui-chuan works as an English-language editor; Fish Lin is employed in the periodicals department of the National Central Library; and Ill Mo, who has two young daughters, runs an online auction website selling clothes, shoes, and accessories with his wife. Fans I interviewed occupy similar socioeconomic strata, although they of course are not attempting to balance musical commitments with other employment.

None of these jobs are particularly lucrative, and it bears noting that the hip-hop lifestyle does not come cheap. As both Nelson George and Cheryl Keyes have noted, fashion is a cornerstone of hip-hop culture, and "attire visually conveys the message, image, and style of a rap artist."[82] Dedicated fans are likewise called upon to dress the part. Procuring the latest in local and international streetwear and acquiring the hottest limited edition kicks requires significant financial investment. At the Ximending streetwear store Doobiest—owned and operated by the group responsible for the Doobiest listening parties discussed in the last chapter—imported sweatshirts by west-coast American brands Tribal and Dyseone run anywhere from US$50 to $100. Those interested in turntablism must direct seemingly limitless sums of money toward not only

[82] Nelson George, *Hip Hop America*, 2nd edition (New York: Penguin, 2005), 156-165; Keyes, *Rap Music*, 151.

acquiring equipment but also building a respectable vinyl collection.[83] DJ Vicar, a fixture of clubs in Taipei, told me that his parents are frustrated that he pours so much of his disposable income into the purchase of records, even though he sees it as an investment in his business. For those who wish to shoot their own videos, a high-quality camera—like the DSLRs I described earlier in this section—is absolutely de rigueur. Artists and audiences can afford these accouterments primarily because they are relegated to living at home with parents, and, with the exception of Ill Mo, almost none have children of their own to support.

Reflecting on Socioeconomic Status Through Performance: RPG

When I set up a meeting with RPG in June of 2011, the rapper initially invited me to his apartment for some home cooking (*jiachangcai* 家常菜). He was eager to show off his skills in the kitchen, and I was honored by his hospitality—I had rarely had the opportunity to visit a performer at home, and I was growing weary of buns and dumplings from street carts and 7-Elevens. Unfortunately, scheduling conflicts necessitated that we meet at a restaurant in Taipei, but RPG was eager to take me to a place that met with his strict standards: Boji Hong Kong-Style Restaurant, in the winding alleys of the Da-An District. Over bowls of noodles and pickled vegetables that sent ribbons of steam into the air, he explained that he is very particular about his food. Perhaps, he speculated, it has something to do with the fact that he was born and raised in Tainan, which many say is home to the island's most flavorful cuisine. After we finished

[83] For more on the importance of acquiring equipment and collecting vinyl, see Keyes, *Rap Music*, 141-145, and Joseph G. Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004).

our meals, we headed over to a nearby bar for drinks. RPG suggested we sit outside and proceeded to light up the first of many cigarettes as I set up my recorder for our interview. The summer heat was intense, and I could feel mosquitos gnawing away at my feet under the table.

Born in 1985, RPG still identifies closely with Tainan, even though he left the city at 18 to study business administration at National Chengchi University in Taipei. He had been something of an academic celebrity in Tainan, enrolled in the most competitive high school and ranked among the top twenty students in the city. "People think hip-hop musicians come from the ghetto and don't study, but nowadays there are others who are very educated," he told me.[84] His mother, a junior high school teacher, came down on him hard about his performance in the classroom, and RPG attributes his academic success to her. His father, who works for the state-owned electric company Taipower, was "very conservative." Neither was thrilled when RPG started writing and performing rap music, but he says they were "also happy for me to not do drugs and just make a living for myself."

RPG works very hard to make a living for himself in Taipei, where he settled after college. His family remains in the south of the island, so he lives on his own with two roommates in a small flat in Zhonghe (中和, "Middle Peace"), a satellite city southeast of the Greater Taipei area. When I ask his occupation, he provides the name of not one workplace and position, but several: Marketing Director for Puff Nation, an apparel company; Marketing Director for BePretty, a women's cosmetics and accessories retailer;

[84] RPG, personal interview, 21 June 2011. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations and factual information on this page through p.176 derive from the same interview.

freelance marketing planner for indie hip-hop artists; freelance recording engineer for classical artists (his clients include the National Symphony Orchestra, National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra, National Chinese Orchestra, and National Taipei Orchestra); and freelance film producer for music videos and sometimes advertisements. Prior to that, he was an account executive for an advertising agency and a marketing planner for EMI Music Publishing. He keeps very busy to pay the bills, and he is fortunate to have a diverse array of practical skills and talents on which to draw.

In between work engagements, he writes and performs his own music, a habit first formed during his time in high school. RPG hated rap at first—he was accustomed to the music his parents listened to, artists like Chiang Hui [*Kang Hūi* 江蕙], the celebrated performer of Hoklo popular music sometimes called the Queen of Taiwanese Song. A tenor in a local chorus, singing, not rapping, was his first passion: "I had a very good singing voice when I was younger. And then I formed an R&B group with my junior high school classmates." They covered American artists like Boyz II Men and Blackstreet, a lot of what he characterized simply as "black music." Through MTV and radio—English-language stations like ICRT and a local Tainan outlet called Touch—he gained exposure to rap. Tupac, Biggie, Puff Daddy, Snoop Dogg, Dr. Dre were all over the airwaves in those days, and the beats and rhymes were infectious. "I thought, 'Wow, this kind of music is, like, very inspiring—and it's perfect for partying. But we don't party, because I was an honors student, so we don't party." Before long, however, he was hanging out with local b-boys and learning to dance. Entranced by hip-hop culture, he traced a path backwards through time to explore the sounds of Grandmaster Flash and DJ Kool Herc. His story is similar to many others I heard on the island: discovery,

curiosity, followed by furious scouring of the Internet for additional information on what to devour next. Master U, the online forum initiated by Teacher Lin, connected him to other rap fans with whom to share his original compositions, discuss new music, and share resources and recordings. He was particularly inspired by the sounds and stories of MC Hotdog, who had graduated from Jianguo High School, the best boys' school in Taipei, before finding acclaim as an MC. If Hotdog could do it, he thought, what was to stop him from becoming a rapper?

Like many artists from Tainan, he maintains a close relationship with Dog G and his creative collective Kung Fu Entertainment. Dog G's influence is palpable in RPG's work: both artists are similarly passionate about sociopolitical issues and the interlocked questions of Taiwanese identity and sovereignty. RPG views his music as a means of communicating his views in an affective, emotional way with listeners, and connects with audiences on the level of shared concerns about not just electoral politics but also wages, work-life balance, and the struggles of everyday living. In our interview, he spoke of intense feelings of dissatisfaction with the current economy and with elected officials he feels are out of touch with the challenges that young people on the island currently face. Taiwanese employees log approximately 2,200 hours annually,[85] some of the longest in the world, but salaries have not kept pace with inflation—between 1997 and 2012, the hourly minimum wage only increased from NT$66 to NT$103 (a difference of

[85] Cindy Sui, "Deaths Spotlight Taiwan's 'Overwork' Culture," *BBC News Asia*, March 19, 2012, accessed March 5, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16834258. Taiwan's Council of Labor Affairs keeps and makes public a range of statistics regarding employment on the island. See http://www.cla.gov.tw/.

approximately US$1)[86] in spite of a 16.35% rise in the consumer price index over the same period.[87] He would like to get married and have children, to live independently, but at this point in time he simply cannot afford to.

For now, he continues trying to balance things as he has in the past—working his various jobs, performing music, and participating in rap community events. He is comfortable enough in his finances to fund his interest in hip-hop, but other life goals remain deferred. This situation is partly a function of RPG's decision to pursue creative professional opportunities, which are never as predictable a source of income as service industry or technical jobs, but his story is also the story of middle-class youth on the island in general, working long hours for minimal pay, sensing that the Taiwan Miracle has faded away or perhaps even passed them by altogether.

PLACES: THE LOCATIONS THAT GATHER COMMUNITY IN THEIR MIDST

RPG, who is acting as master of ceremonies for this concert, welcomes Dog G to the stage, and the two of them engage in stage patter before Dog G launches into some fierce freestyle. They shift fluidly between Hoklo and Mandarin, as nearly everyone in Tainan seems to. I continue to explore the performance space as Dog G begins his set, moving further to the back end of the lot. Once I have reached its outer limit, I begin to probe the perimeter of the area, which is square in shape and probably little more than an acre in size. Vendors hawking CDs, handicrafts, and locally designed vinyl toys in the

[86] "Table 1-1 Major Labor and Economic Indicator," Council of Labor Affairs, last modified January 2013, http://statdb.cla.gov.tw/html/mon/c1010.htm.

[87] "Consumer Price Indices," Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting, and Statistics, Executive Yuan, R.O.C. (Taiwan), last modified February 2013, http://www.dgbas.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=12092&ctNode=1558.

likeness of folk heroes and earth gods (tudi gong 土地公) *have set up booths on three edges of the lot. The fourth edge comprises the stage, which is flanked on either side by large screens where some groups are projecting evocative images and lyrics to accompany their songs. These enliven and intensify their performances, but as an added benefit they also throw extra light over the space, which is somewhat dark even underneath a very bright moon.*

Immediately behind me, I see a row of shops—mom and pop-type businesses, a 7-Eleven where everyone is buying cold beverages to offset their discomfort in the searing heat. Nearby, there are places selling bubble tea, curry rice, and dumplings, alongside auto parts vendors and clothing stores. There are also numerous seedy "beauty salons," the kinds of establishments that provide sexual services to customers as readily as haircuts. It surprises me that no one living or working here complains about the noise from the show, which is really quite substantial. Near the stage, the speakers boom. Even from some distance away, my sternum pounds so hard that it seems like the force of the sound alone could move my blood around. But here we are, right in the middle of the city, right in the middle of everything, and it is past ten o'clock, and the shop owners are sanguine.

It seems a minor miracle, but I also suspect that Kung Fu Entertainment, the group that organized this event, has used this space for shows before and made peace with the neighbors. Dog G is quite a celebrity here in Tainan and also an extremely active, affable member of the local community. Earlier on, he and many of today's performers lit incense and made offerings of pineapples, papayas, and ghost money to the local gods. After nightfall, he received a visit from Su Tseng-Chang (*Su Zhenchang* 蘇貞

昌)*, a prominent member of the Democratic Progressive Party and a very popular political figure around these parts. I suspect all of this helps curry favor with the surrounding community.*

I start to move back towards the stage area, this time walking not through the audience but around the perimeter of the lot. The wall along the left edge has been spray-painted with graffiti in all manner of soft but brilliant colors: pale purple, gold, seafoam green, sky blue. I suspect the jagged geometric figures that I see inscribed on the wall are tags, but I can't make out what they say, or even what language they might represent. I approach the stage again just as Dog G is announcing the debut of a new song…

* * *

In *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization*, Ian Condry locates the heart of the rap scene in the many nightclubs, or *kurabu*, that dot the landscapes of urban Japan.[88] Through close examination of the performative and sociomusical goings-on in such establishments, he traces rap's resonances through a broad array of concentric contexts, including "the youth's position in Japan's changing economy; the growing importance of so-called content industries—including music—for producing economic growth; and the government's interest in promoting the nation's cultural soft power."[89] In Condry's narrative, the *kurabu* are paradigmatic "sites of

[88] Condry, *Hip-Hop Japan.*

[89] Ibid., 88.

actualization," where rappers meet their public and compete for dominance in the scene.[90] They are, to put it neatly, where everything really goes down.

Although there is much about the Taiwan rap scene, and about Taiwanese approaches to rap, that feels of a piece with what Condry found in Japan, I know of no single parallel to *kurabu* on the island. There are of course clubs—or "live houses," as they are more commonly called—where performances sometimes take place, but these are by no means the predominant sites of actualization for artists or audiences. Indeed, the Taiwan scene has not one but multiple hearts. Artists make stages of a wide variety of diffuse but particular sites: public parks, university campuses, city plazas, abandoned lots, and bookstores. Put together as a list, these read as an almost random assortment, but the logic that underpins their selection is relatively transparent to community members: rap takes place wherever it *can* take place on the island, and audiences are more than happy to meet artists wherever they are. Beyond places of performance, there are also other kinds of sites around which rap's interpretive community coalesces. Participants in the scene come together to learn and share about rap music in university classrooms and also in the virtual realm, that is, through online forums. Artists work in recording studios and audiences converge on particular stores to shop for their recordings. The various places in which the rap community produces, consumes, socializes around, and studies the music collectively form the heart of the scene.

I use the term "place" to describe these locations intentionally, inspired by philosopher Edward Casey's notion of how places "gather." He writes: "Minimally, places gather things in their midst—where 'things' connote various animate entities.

[90] Ibid., 94.

Places also gather experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts."[91] Condry's citation of the *kurabu* illustrates this phenomenon of gathering in Japan, with the interaction of artists and audiences producing a constantly flowing and pooling stream of experiences and memories. In Taiwan, the scattered map of locations where the rap community coalesces represents a similar phenomenon. But as in Casey's conception, these places are not "one definite sort of thing—for example, physical, spiritual, cultural, social—a given place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event: places not only *are* they *happen*. (And it is because they happen that they lend themselves so well to narration, whether as history or story.)" (Casey 27). Place as event, place as story: these conceptions of place have special meaning for a community in which social gathering and knowledge of Taiwan rap's histories are crucial components of membership. For example, the lot where "The 921.87 Benefit Concert" took place has also served as the site of numerous other rap concerts and gatherings. Beyond the physical traces left in the form of graffiti and performance advertisements peeling from the walls, the history of the place is known to community members and reconstituted each time they come together.

In the following pages, I examine some of the places that are meaningful to the rap community and which the rap community has imbued with meaning. I begin with a foray into localities, the geographical places from which community members hail and that they seek to represent through their participation in the scene. I then examine places

[91] Edward S. Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena," in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 24.

of learning, the locations—virtual and physical—upon and through which the community identifies and negotiates shared musical and extramusical values. I conclude with a discussion of places of production, the sites that gather the experiences, sounds, languages, and stories that this dissertation takes as its core objects of exploration.

Localities

On a grey, damp morning in October 2010, I traveled to the Neihu District of Taipei to observe and participate in a video shoot for a new song, Dog G's "Change Taiwan" (*Gaibian Taiwan* 改變台灣). The track, written and recorded on commission from the Democratic Progressive Party in advance of the 2010 municipal elections, was part of a broad-based campaign to encourage young people on the island to vote. Dog G invited over a hundred and fifty performers, athletes, and members of university hip-hop clubs from the five special municipalities holding elections—Tainan, Gaoxiong, Taizhong, Taipei, and New Taipei—to appear, walking behind him in a large group. As a camera crew set up a shot in the middle of a broad thoroughfare framed by tall, modern office buildings, I meandered through the crowds assembled on the sidelines waiting for filming to start. Many of the participants were attired in ways that hinted at their city of origin. Those who had come from Tainan, for example, were wearing black baseball caps emblazoned with the sign of Kung Fu Entertainment: the character for "merit" (*gong* 功), embroidered in yellow. Similarly, those from Taizhong donned baseball caps reading "911," the name of a legendary local crew, in bold white print. When they scattered into the street to begin shooting, the effect was striking—moving together in clusters, holding their heads up high, looking tough for the camera, they seemed proud to



Figure 5: Participants filming a scene for Dog G's "Change Taiwan" (*Gaibian Taiwan* 改變台灣) video, from the five special municipalities, 17 October 2010. Photo by author.

represent on behalf of their respective localities.

Hip-hop scholar Murray Foreman has written extensively about the ways in which "Rap's lyrical constructions commonly display a pronounced emphasis on place and locality."[92] He observes that American rap music often goes beyond citing regions and cities to make "explicit references to particular streets, boulevards and neighborhoods, telephone area codes, postal service zip codes, or other sociospatial information" (Foreman xvii). Taiwan is small in terms of its geographic area—as I have noted, it is little larger than the states of Maryland and Delaware combined—and the majority of the population is concentrated in the metropolitan areas represented at Dog G's video shoot

[92] Murray Foreman, *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), xvii.

that day. It is perhaps because of the island's diminutive size and uneven population distribution that most sonic and textual references to place and locality tend to center on the unit of the city. There are of course some exceptions—the English name of the group MJ116 (*Wantong* 頑童, lit. "Naughty Kids"), for example, refers specifically to its members' allegiances to the Muzha (木柵) district of Taipei, the postal code of which is 116. Generally speaking, however, on the occasion that one hears mention of a locality in a Taiwan rap song, that locality is one of the major cities: Tainan, Gaoxiong, Taizhong, or Taipei. I conducted research in all of these cities during the course of my fieldwork, with greatest emphasis on Taipei, where I lived, and Tainan, where I visited frequently for performances and interviews. These two places, representing the north and south of the island, hold significance to community members as points of origin for Taiwan rap. Tainan is home to Dog G's Kung Fu Entertainment, the most broadly influential creative collective on the island; Taipei is the entertainment capital and home to MC Hotdog, who many regard as Taiwan's first bona fide MC.

In many ways, these localities could not be more different. The Taiwan Economic Miracle did not affect the island or its peoples in a uniform fashion: there are well-recognized socioeconomic inequalities dividing the north from the south and the urban from the rural parts of Taiwan. The north of the island is the seat of government and industry, and therefore where the majority of wealth is concentrated; the cities hold the majority of high paying jobs and therefore promise greater opportunity than more rural, agriculture-focused outposts. Disparities between north and south, urban and rural, ramify throughout the process by which individuals progress through the educational system and into professions. Geographic variations in educational opportunity and

achievement have also historically overlapped with achievement gaps between the Mainlander and Native Taiwanese populations.[93] Although the wealthier, more developed north is ethnically diverse, it is home to the majority of Taiwan's Mainlander population and is predominantly Mandarin speaking. The population of the southwestern part of the island, on the other hand, is dominated by Hoklo people, many of whom are just as comfortable speaking Hoklo as Mandarin. Between the 1960s and 1990s, Mainlanders received an average of 2.4 years more formal schooling than Native Taiwanese, and they tended to work at greater rates in the higher-earning "tertiary industries"—commerce, finance, transportation, and services.[94] In recent years, disparities in the length of education have begun to close, but powerful stereotypes of northerners as more "educated" and "cultured" than southerners persist, no doubt buttressed by years of government cultural policy that subordinated local languages and cultural practices for the sake of promoting KMT claims to political legitimacy. In brief, the north has historically dominated the south of the island economically, politically, and in terms of its reputation as a cultural center. The distinctive environments of Taipei and Tainan have given rise to distinctive rap cultures, characterized by differing approaches to performance and social interaction.

Taipei

On a typical Saturday night, a long line wraps around the curb outside of Luxy, a popular nightclub located on Zhongxiao East Road, one of the premier shopping strips in all of Taiwan. This section of the city glitters. There are plenty of decrepit old buildings

[93] See Wang, "Ethnicized Social Mobility."

[94] Ibid., 355-357.

here streaked with mold and rust, but thousands of radiant neon signs and glowing storefronts obscure the grime when the sun goes down. The entrance to Luxy is located on the ground floor of a building that is home to numerous other small businesses, including a Starbucks, an arcade, and boutiques selling cosmetics and risqué clothing for young women. Sogo, the posh Japanese department store, is a stone's throw from here, as are the upscale Breeze Center mall and Cash Box (*Qiangui* 錢櫃), a multistory karaoke palace with sparkling chandeliers and marble floors. Everyone waiting outside Luxy's doors is dressed in their Saturday-night best: women are in sky-high heels and tight skirts, men in expensive jeans and limited-edition sneakers. The chatter from the crowd sounds decidedly international, a mix of German, French, English, Italian, Mandarin and Cantonese. Venues like this one cater primarily to the cosmopolitan tastes of young, wealthy Taipei, a demographic with spare cash, spare time, and a penchant for pleasure.

Rap artists living and working in Taipei have an ambivalent relationship with this side of the city. On the one hand, they benefit from close proximity to a high density of entertainment-related businesses and to the resources that attend this kind of wealth and economic activity. Although clubs like Luxy are known for their rosters of all-star DJs, including imported talent like Steve Aoki and David Guetta, local rappers like MC Hotdog occasionally find themselves on the schedule. MC Hotdog's success and base of operations in Taipei has generated a notable trickle-down effect for local artists: his label, True Color (*Bense* 本色), headed by pop star Chang Chen-yue, also represents a number of other up-and-comers in the Taiwan rap world, including Witness, the Tripoets, and MJ116. The imprimatur of MC Hotdog, not to mention Chang, is a tremendous boon to

these artists as they struggle to sell records in a challenging market. Even so, most Taipei-based rappers inhabit spaces very much on the margins of this glittering world. The DJs who spin regularly at Luxy, including Noodles and DJ Mr. Gin, rarely play local hip-hop. They feel that production quality on the island is generally sub-par and that local recordings simply do not hold up against songs from the United States and Europe.[95] Moreover, they maintain that the heavy lyrics of conscious and political rap—i.e. the rhymes of rappers like Dog G—are inappropriate for play in nightclub environments, where the emphasis is on dancing, drinking, and forgetting one's troubles.

Some artists respond to these challenges by courting the club scene and embracing its hedonism in their music production. Of note, MJ116 produces songs like 2011's "Super Duper Hot," "Rap Star," and "Drinking Song" (*He jiu ge* 喝酒歌) that employ globally ubiquitous, danceable hip-hop beats and deal primarily with lighter themes like carousing, gambling, and dalliances with women.[96] At the other end of the spectrum lie rappers who revolt against Taipei's at times aggressively commercial atmosphere. Resistant impulses permeate the lyrics and personae of artists such as Kou Chou Ching and Chang Jui-chuan, who sample markedly less danceable, historically significant sounds and traditional musics, and who write lyrics about local political and social issues. In some cases, Taipei has also served as inspiration to these kinds of artists,

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[95] DJ Mr. Gin, DJ Noodles, DJ Royal, and DJ Daryl Yang; personal interview; 6 February 2010.

[96] None of these tracks have yet appeared on albums, but all are available online. See "Super Duper Hot," video clip, accessed March 8, 2013, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MnZTjsCg_4; "Rap Star (Rough Mix)," video clip, accessed March 8, 2013, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYE9kBnJYD0; "He jiu ge" 喝酒歌 [Drinking song], video clip, accessed March 8, 2013, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIcMUrCKxL8.

albeit in a wholly different way: Kou Chou Ching's "The History of Taipei City" (*Beicheng jianggu* 北城講古), for example, was written as part of a 2010 campaign to elect DPP politician Su Tseng-chang to the position of mayor.[97] The song explores the human development of the city from its first Aboriginal inhabitants to the European colonial campaigns, settlement by Hakka and Hoklo peoples, Japanese colonization, and beyond. It urges listeners to remember the city's many places of historical significance and cautions against forgetting the stories of the past. Its lyrics are set against a chorus sung in a *gezaixi* vocal style by opera star Li Jingfang (利靜芳), suggesting that the city has a deeper core of traditional culture that belies its reputation as a fashionable, consumerist cosmopolitan center.

There is space enough in Taipei, then, for what might be considered a more mainstream and a more underground musical culture to coexist. Luxy is located in the glamorous Dongqu area of Taipei, but there are other neighborhoods associated with the more rough-and-tumble underground arts scene that the city's rappers haunt more frequently. Ximending—the older "West Gate" District—is a hub of youth activity and a prime spot for independent music and cinema. The centerpiece of the area is the Red House Theatre (*Honglou juchang* 紅樓劇場), an octagonal, red brick structure built during the Japanese colonial period and originally designed to serve as a market.[98] The

[97] Kou Chou Ching 拷秋勤, "Beicheng jianggu" 北城講古 [The history of Taipei City], *Open Taipei*, Himalaya Records, 2010, compact disc. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Kou Chou Ching is listed in the liner notes under the name "Taipei Government Sound Organization" (*Taibei fu yinxiao zuzhi* 台北府音效組織). Other artists who performed on the album also use aliases.

[98] For more on the Red House Theatre, including an English-language account of its history, see http://www.redhouse.org.tw/info_en.aspx.

plaza around the Red House, in addition to being home to a cluster of bars that cater to the city's gay and lesbian community, is a popular place for outdoor performances. The rear of the Red House also offers a sought-after venue for rappers: the Riverside Live House (*He-an liuyan* 河岸留言), a two-story club that frequently hosts up-and-coming and underground musicians. The areas around two of the city's large universities, National Taiwan University and National Taiwan Normal University (*Guoli Taiwan shifan daxue* 國立台灣師範大學), offer similarly rich resources to artists. Taipei's foremost small venues for live music—The Wall, Riverside Music Café, Kafka on the Shore, the Witch House, and the now-defunct Underworld—are scattered throughout the neighborhoods surrounding these institutions, tucked in amongst bookshops and cafes. The ongoing viability of these smaller establishments alongside large nightclubs like Luxy reflects the city's ability to sustain a range of performance activities, among which rappers move eagerly and opportunistically.

And yet Taipei seems unable to shake its image as a fundamentally superficial, money-driven place. When I asked Teacher Lin of the Tripoets, who is originally from Taizhong but attended university in Taipei, for his take on perceptions of Taipei among participants in the rap scene, he offered:

> There's a very popular term right now in Taiwan: *tianlongren* 天龍人 [lit. "heavenly dragon people"]. It means people from Taipei City who have very high social status and economic status. And the reference is from a comic book—in that comic book there's a group of people called *tianlongren*, and basically [they] will put on a bubble or a protective suit to protect themselves from outsiders, and they view themselves as the ruler of their domain. So

> many people view people from Taipei, from places like Tianmu and Dongqu, as *tianlongren*.[99]

The notion of the *tianlongren* posits people from Taipei—especially the wealthier parts of the city, where there also happen to be more foreign nationals—as irredeemably snobbish and unwilling to sully themselves through contact with "regular" folk. I challenged Lin on this, asking him how he explains the presence in the Taipei scene of artists like Kou Chou Ching and Chang Jui-chuan, who have almost no involvement in the nightclub business or other explicitly commercial ventures. He responded:

> It's the geographical imagination. [Those artists] definitely don't position themselves in their lyrics as people from Taipei. Taipei is becoming a space, so to speak, that doesn't speak Taiwanese, only speaks Mandarin, uses a lot of English and of course has higher social status, higher economic status. And of course our government is based in Taipei. So any time the government messes up, then it goes back to this north and south divide. *They* are the *tianlongren*, they don't understand the rest of Taiwan. Chang Jui-chuan is originally from Zhanghua [in central Taiwan], and in the geographical imagination he's always distancing himself from Taipei.[100]

Lin's reference to the "geographical imagination" is telling here, as it contrasts with what we might call, after Louis Althusser, Taipei's "real conditions of existence."[101] In fact, the city is quite diverse, and its residents represent numerous ethnic affiliations and socioeconomic strata. Its commercial industries dominate and its wealthiest districts are touted by the government and tourism industries as the jewels in Taiwan's crown. But

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[99] Teacher Lin 林老師, phone interview, 17 August 2012. The comic book to which Lin refers is actually a work of Japanese *manga*, very popular in Taiwan, called *One Piece*.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971).

like any large city, Taipei has its share of working class enclaves and older neighborhoods that remain largely undeveloped by commercial interests.[102] Nevertheless, the city is perceived as fundamentally detached from the rest of the island culturally, politically, economically, and linguistically. As a performer in a Taipei-based crew, Lin told me that he tends to leave locality out of his lyrics: "We never say we represent Taipei. First of all, it's nonsense because Taipei is already represented a lot. Actually, we did write a song called 'Taipei City,' but it wasn't released anywhere. I don't know why we wrote it…"[103]

Tainan

Although DJ Mr. Gin now lives and works in Taipei, he hails from Tainan originally. In a February 2010 interview, he laughed as he compared the two places:

> There are lots of differences between Taipei and Tainan! We get less information [about rap] in Tainan, and we have fewer places to go. Like, Taipei has clubs and stuff…the south doesn't have anything at all. You rent a room and use it as a studio, and everyone just comes together. And you can just listen, like go to a record store and listen to

[102] Chinese literature scholar Joseph R. Allen's thoughts about the relationship of the Eastern District to the older parts of the city, which draw in turn on the thoughts of Sue-Ching Jou, echo my own: "…the emergence in the 1990s of the new 'city center' (*shizhongxin*) in the Eastside (Dongqu), which has come to occupy a central position both politically and economically in the post-martial law period. With the emergence of a new city center, the old government and entertainment centers in the downtown area were pushed aside, but not replaced—they continue to function but have lost social and economic force. Yet, the old areas also continued to apply pressure/resistance against the Eastside, principally in their claim of cultural authenticity in the *bentuhua* (localization) ideology." Joseph R. Allen, *Taipei: City of Displacements* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 188-189. Also see Sue-Ching Jou, "Domestic Politics in Urban Image Creation: Xinyi as the 'Manhattan of Taipei,'" in *Globalizing Taipei: The Political Economy of Spatial Development*, ed. Reginald Yin-Wang Kwok (New York: Routledge, 2005), 120-140.

[103] Teacher Lin, personal interview.

> CDs, listen to the flow. And you just go and translate lyrics, you find lyrics. In Taipei, the feeling is more luxurious. What you wear is even different: in Tainan you just go out in black t-shirts, white t-shirts…in Taipei you have to wear a watch, very bling-bling.[104]

Gin's comments about the two cities focus on the different atmospheres that result from their disparities in size and wealth. Whereas Taipei is a sprawling metropolis that is home to about 2.6 million people (nearly seven million if you include New Taipei, Keelung, and the rest of the metropolitan area), Tainan only has about 750,000. Taipei's status as the island's financial and entertainment hub has provided the necessary capital base to sustain numerous venues in which to hear, purchase, and perform music, a far cry from what Gin describes in Tainan, where it is left up to members of the rap community to create their own spaces for these kinds of opportunities and activities.

This description of Tainan as less upwardly mobile and less extravagant certainly jives with what most travelers experience when they arrive in the city, the fifth largest on the island. It takes under two hours to reach Tainan from Taipei by high-speed rail, but in many ways the south feels much further removed. It is considerably hotter than the subtropical north, its skyline lower to the ground with no conspicuous landmarks, and its infrastructure is older. Many of its small shops shutter their windows during the day when it is simply too hot to do business. Compared to the capital, Tainan feels almost somnolent until the sun goes down, when the night markets open and people shuffle out of their workplaces and onto the streets to socialize, eat, and run errands. The city lacks a subway system, so most residents get around by bus, foot, or motor scooter. If Taipei is now characterized by its newer developments in the Dongqu area of the city, Tainan

[104] DJ Mr. Gin, personal interview.

proudly wears a patina of age. There are numerous well-preserved temples and small shrines that date to the seventeenth century, and the city is dotted with historical sites that reference its significance as an important base of operations for the Dutch and the island's capital under Qing rule.

Although Tainan has its fair share of bars and restaurants, there are, as Gin noted, few clubs to speak of and just a smattering of music shops here and there. Nevertheless, Tainan has developed over the years into a center for rap music on the island, owing primarily to the efforts of Dog G and his local colleagues. Unlike Taipei, which lacks a clear creative center, the rap scene in Tainan is mediated primarily by Kung Fu Entertainment, which organizes activities, produces recordings, runs a popular blog, and even provides training to students who want to learn how to rap.[105] The group occupies a shabby brick-and-mortar building in the downtown area and functions essentially as a non-profit organization. As DJ Mr. Gin, an affiliate of Kung Fu Entertainment, explained to me, the group self-finances its shows and never does better than to break even after all costs are accounted for.[106] While this independence from commercial interests means that Kung Fu Entertainment is always somewhat strapped for cash, it also means that the group is beholden to no one and free to pursue an activist agenda without fear of recrimination from sponsors who take issue with its politics. The group's agenda is hardly veiled: I attended a number of Kung Fu Entertainment events, including a Mother's Day (*muqinjie* 母親節) charity performance and a competition for amateur performers, as well as "The 921.87 Benefit Concert" that I have been describing in brief

[105] Kung Fu Entertainment's Web site, http://dogg.pixnet.net/blog.

[106] DJ Mr. Gin, personal interview.

episodes throughout this chapter; donations collected at the latter show funded relief efforts coordinated by the Mission Foundation of the Presbyterian Church, not a politically neutral organization but well known on the island for its support of "the use of the Hoklo language, human rights, and democracy," a "cluster of policies and beliefs [that] orients the Presbyterian Church towards favoring Taiwan independence."[107]

The activist bent of Kung Fu Entertainment and many of its members is very much in step with the political environment in Tainan in general. A popular saying on the island has it that "the north is Blue, the south is Green" (*bei lan nan lu* 北藍南綠), meaning that since the 2000 elections the northern counties have tended to throw their support behind the KMT (identified with the color blue), and the southern counties behind the DPP (identified with the color green). This is of course an oversimplification, as voting patterns on the island vary with a number of other factors including ethnicity, education level, and socioeconomic status.[108] It happens to have the ring of truth as far as Tainan is concerned, however: as previously noted, the city has a majority Hoklo population and is a well-known stronghold for the DPP. Dog G and Kung Fu Entertainment are very much at one with the local community in promoting "green" ideologies and organizations. To this end, Dog G appears frequently on behalf of DPP interests, performing at political rallies and fundraising events.

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[107] Nancy Guy, "Feeling a Shared History Through Song: 'A Flower in the Rainy Night' as a Key Cultural Symbol in Taiwan," *TDR: The Drama Review* 52, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 65n2.

[108] For more on voting patterns, see Jinn-Guey Lay, Ko-Hua Yap, and Yu-Wen Chen, "The Transition of Taiwan's Political Geography," *Asian Survey* 48, no. 5 (Sept./Oct., 2008): 773-793.

When I interviewed Kung Fu Entertainment-affiliated rapper Dadi (大帝) in September 2010, his take on the differences between the Taipei and Tainan scenes echoed what I had heard from DJ Mr. Gin seven months earlier, but he also added that the economic and social climate of Tainan had contributed to a sense of "realness" in the music of artists from the area:

> In Taipei, many rappers are just like party emcees. They just rap and rap and dress so they look hot, and they're always changing their clothes, always changing their appearance…I think in Tainan we are relatively, well maybe it's because of the kinds of conditions we grew up in…Everyone just does their own work, is a student, is a regular person. There isn't the same kind of nightlife, the same kind of enticements. So I think that the stuff Tainan rappers write is all a little more real, like, it has more to do with society.[109]

Dadi paints a picture of Tainan as a somewhat more austere place than Taipei, with fewer "enticements," and Tainan rappers as therefore less superficial and invested in the partying lifestyle. Like Gin, he notes the fashionable clothing that northerners wear, suggesting that the Taipei obsession with sartorial matters is evidence of superficiality in the scene. In his view, Tainan is a more down-to-earth place and Tainan rap is more about "reality"—the Real—than fantasy.

Whereas Taipei rappers rarely write songs in praise of their city, Tainan's position as the anti-Taipei has inspired numerous lyrical salutes. The 2002 Hoklo-language song "My Tainan City" (*Wode Tainanshi* 我的台南市)—written and performed by the now-defunct group Bamboo Gang (*Zhubang* 竹棒), comprising MCs RPG, Soft Lipa, and Gordon (*Guodan* 國蛋)—calls out residents of northern Taiwan for their sense of

[109] Dadi 大帝, personal interview, 26 September 2010.

superiority and sings the praises of an underappreciated and oft-maligned southern culture.[110] Soft Lipa delivers the final verse:

so 北部人不通 看阮不起
台南不是你們口中 落後的城市
文化古都在這裡 嘻哈重鎮在這裡
名勝古蹟在這裡 美食天堂 也在這裡
四季陽光普照 人情味 浸延其中
府城 快快樂樂生活 士農工商
那就是我的故鄉

so northerners who don't understand, look down on me
Tainan is not as you say, a backwards city
the old cultural capital is here, the hip-hop city is here
famous historical sites are here, culinary heaven is here
the sun shines in all four seasons, there is strength of human bonds
those from all walks of life can live happily in Fucheng
that's my hometown

The song pays homage to the city's cultural richness and what its authors feel is its superior quality of life. The reference to "Fucheng," an archaic name for Tainan highlighting its former identity as a center for government (*fu* 府), reminds us that Taipei was not always the island's capital. A looped four-bar melody in 4/4 time performed on the *sanxian* underpins the entire track.[111] Although it does not refer to any particular folk tune or build on any recognizable local scale, the instrumentation suggests a traditional source and underscores the group's lyrical insistence on Tainan's historical significance. Finally, by calling Tainan "the hip-hop city," Soft Lipa challenges the ascendance of a

[110] Bamboo Gang 竹幫, "Wode Tainanshi" 我的台南市 [My Tainan City], video clip, accessed March 6, 2013, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbx9AoJrx3U.

[111] I asked RPG if he could identify the sample used in "My Tainan City," but he could not recall its source. I discuss sampling practices in Taiwan rap more extensively in Part Three.

dominant Taipei and argues that his hometown has as much or more to offer as a center for the rap community.

* * *

Beyond Taipei and Tainan, there are of course other localities that Taiwan's rappers reference and other cities from which they issue. Taizhong, for example, played an important role in rap's development on the island around the turn of the twenty-first century. As the home of the influential underground group T.T.M. ("Top Trouble Makers" or "Taizhong Trouble Makers"), the central Taiwanese city emerged alongside Tainan as a key site of resistance to the dominance of Taipei. Although it remains home to a number of performance venues and its universities host a very active community of fans, Taizhong has receded in importance over the years. Ultimately, it is the north and south of the island that form the poles of a classic hip-hop rivalry, an echo of the notorious feud between east and west coast rappers that characterized the American scene in the 1990s. For the most part, this rivalry has inspired non-violent competition and has inspired performers in both areas to contemplate the ways in which their places of work and places of origin shape their approaches to performance and their values as a community.

Places of Learning

Thus far, I have explored two localities of particular significance to Taiwan's rap community. Hereafter I move to more use-specific spots, beginning with an exploration of several places where artists and audiences engage in the focused study of rap music and hip-hop culture. In *The Real Hiphop: Battling for Knowledge, Power, and Respect in the LA Underground*, Marcyliena Morgan writes extensively about the performance of

rap music as nourished by the process of knowledge acquisition. She explores how everything from developing "everyday language creativity,"[112] to demonstrating cultural insidership,[113] to gaining membership in the core and long-term communities materializes from hip-hop devotees' dedication to learning as much as possible about the music's history, cultural significance, and aesthetic possibilities.[114] The notion of learning as critical to hip-hop's growth and survival prevails among those who make the music as well as those who study it: Afrika Bambaataa, the South Bronx DJ widely considered one of hip-hop's foremost architects, has often referred to "knowledge" as hip-hop's fifth element, on equal footing in its importance with rap, DJing, graffiti, and dance.[115] In his view, knowledge plays a critical organizational and transformational role in hip-hop, guiding performers through their development and practice of the other elements. Moreover, through becoming knowledgeable about hip-hop and the broader world to which hip-hop is duty-bound to respond, Bambaataa teaches that community members can nurture the spread of peace and foster greater understanding between people.

Participants in Taiwan's rap community take their roles as students and teachers very seriously. A culture of learning pervades the scene at every level: artists and audiences tend to achieve high rates of educational attainment; some MCs assume the personae of teachers in performance (Teacher Lin, for example, and Chang Jui-chuan,

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[112] Marcyliena Morgan, *The Real Hiphop: Battling for Knowledge, Power, and Respect in the LA Underground* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 62.

[113] Ibid., 74.

[114] Ibid., 55-62.

[115] "Hip Hop History Month," Universal Zulu Nation, accessed March 6, 2013, http://www.zulunation.com/hip_hop_history_2.htm, paragraphs 4-7.

who is often referred to as "Teacher Chang" by fans); artists and audiences enroll in classes and apprentice themselves to instructors to learn performance techniques; school life and academic affairs are a prominent theme of rap songs; and the music itself is often didactic in tone. Perhaps more significantly, the island's many universities serve as important loci of community activity: from the end of the 1980s when Blacklist Workshop first released *Songs of Madness*, to the early 2000s when National Taiwan University inaugurated the Hip-Hop Culture Research Society, to today's campus concerts, institutions of higher learning have been critical sites of development and reception for rap artists. In interviews with artists and audiences I also noted a widespread sense of hip-hop as itself educational—many spoke of their early exposures to American rap as motivating a desire to study English, to learn more about rap's historical antecedents, and to search for ways that the music could be made local by local performers.

This kind of knowledge transmission and acquisition transpires in a number of different places on the island. In the following pages I examine three locations that my research associates identified as particularly significant to their learning, two of which are traditional geographic places and—summoning Casey's notion of place as not "one definite sort of thing"—the other of which is virtual. I begin by sketching a portrait of a classroom at National Taiwan University in Taipei, the site of a meeting of the NTU Hip-Hop Culture Research Society. I explore how club members interact with one another and with their de facto instructors in this place, taking their roles as university students and recasting them to become students of hip-hop. I then proceed to a description of the headquarters of Kung Fu Entertainment in downtown Tainan, where students of Dog G

and his associates gather to socialize, record, and study rap music. I conclude with a discussion of the importance of virtual spaces, especially online Bulletin Board Systems (BBS). My particular focus here is a BBS known as the Professional Technology Temple, or PTT, a place where artists and audiences network with one another and share information about rap and community activities.

A Classroom at National Taiwan University

On a balmy October 2010 evening, about twenty young people gathered in a classroom on the campus of National Taiwan University. Members of the extracurricular Hip-Hop Culture Research Society, many of them were well acquainted as a result of sustained participation in club events and regular attendance at area performances. Old friends, mostly young men, greeted one another as they entered the room, sometimes with a wave and sometimes with a high-five or pat on the back. DJ Vicar, a well-known and highly respected Taipei-based turntablist, sat on a raised platform at the head of the room, where a professor would normally be. Dressed in a shiny puffer jacket, his long hair was pulled back in a ponytail, and his backpack, set on the floor by his feet, was stuffed to overflowing with records. On the blackboard behind him were reminders that this place was, in fact, a university facility—someone had written the following in English, presumably as part of a lesson in mechanical drawing: "CAD Modeling: 1) wireframe modeling 2) surface 3) solid." Vicar had his basic setup ready to go—two turntables and a mixer were plugged in to the outlet behind the desk and were humming with electricity.

As a few more attendees filtered into the room and sat at desks, and others put their heads down and closed their eyes to rest, Vicar started to spin. The Society president, wearing a baggy black t-shirt and jeans and a black backward-facing cap,



Figure 6: Members of the NTU Hip-Hop Culture Research Society gather around for a lesson in the basic tenets of DJing, 29 October 2010. Photo by author.

introduced Vicar to the group and thanked him for coming; those in the audience clapped respectfully. Brooklyn-based retro soul/funk artists Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings played quietly as Vicar invited us to gather around for a lesson in the basic tenets of DJing. Everyone, including me, shuffled up to the desk and watched attentively as Vicar switched out the Sharon Jones for some Michael Jackson, then switched that out for some Otis Redding. His motions were fluid, and the fissures between the recordings were barely audible. As he gave his lesson, one club member picked up a piece of chalk and started recording the key terms Vicar was using on the blackboard, alongside the mechanical drawing vocabulary: "1) fade 2) loop 3) stylus." Everyone looked very serious; several people scribbled down notes in small, tidy ledgers.

The National Taiwan University Hip-Hop Culture Research Society, co-founded in 2000 by Teacher Lin and an older student whom Lin calls simply "Classmate Su" (*Su Tongxue* 蘇同學), is one of the organizational pillars of the Taiwan rap community.[116] As noted in Part One, Lin had started the online discussion forum Master U during high school, which allowed rap enthusiasts all over the island to network with one another and share information remotely for the first time. The Society, which Lin helped to initiate when he matriculated at NTU, was designed to serve as a "real-world" complement to that online experience, a place where budding artists and fans might come together and meet in the flesh. The historical importance of the organization to participants in the rap community was evident to me as it was repeatedly mentioned in interviews: a number of current performers forged early relationships at Society get-togethers during the early 2000s; the group was the first to organize outings, activities, and lectures on rap-related subjects; and regular meetings provided an early venue for the exchange of recordings that were, at that time, difficult to procure on the island. Membership was open to students from any university, not just those at the elite NTU, and many traveled from more distant campuses to participate.[117]

In a 2010 interview, Teacher Lin recalled the early days of the Society:

> There was this senior [at NTU], he was quite famous in the hip-hop forum that I first started in high school, Master U…I knew him through the Internet before I got into NTU, so when I got into NTU we talked about starting a hip-hop culture club, in a rush, and we didn't follow the formal rules of establishing a club in the college. And I remember the first thing, when school started in September at NTU,

[116] Teacher Lin, personal interview, 18 October 2010.

[117] Danny Wang 王韋翔, personal interview, 7 March 2010.

> there was this club exhibition thing, and every club had a corner of the campus, you know, trying to get freshmen to join the club. And of course we didn't apply for that in time, but we set up our corner regardless. And we were chased away by the officials in the school, the authorities. And we were proud of that somehow, because we started this hip-hop culture club and what could be more suitable than being chased away in this context?[118]

They might have shown a rebellious streak at the beginning, but the Society quickly assumed a more academic atmosphere once meetings started:

> We would meet weekly. The first year, the senior, Classmate Su, was the president. And he would lecture, he would try to be very academic. We would print out a syllabus, we'd assign readings, articles from the Internet talking about hip-hop culture, and I remember when *Hip Hop America* was first translated into Chinese and there was a book-publishing event, we as a club attended that event. So it was very scholarly in a way.[119]

It was around this time that Lin assumed the identity of "Teacher Lin," a pedagogue figure for the community:

> I think we were trying to educate, because hip-hop at that time was quite well known as a performative genre, some [Taiwanese people] knew graffiti and stuff, the DJ of course is a very popular image. Rap music, relatively, had just started, I mean *Taiwanese* rap music. Well, even American rap music was just starting to be mainstream in Taiwan…So we were trying to teach people what is hip-hop music. And one of our slogans was 'hip-hop is music' as opposed to 'hip-hop is just dancing.' So we were coming from a place where a lot of people were ignorant about what is hip-hop music, what is hip-hop music in general. So we would talk about the history, we would trace back to the South Bronx, we would talk about the four elements. Then afterwards we would go to the technicalities.[120]

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[118] Teacher Lin, personal interview.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid.

Today, the Hip-Hop Culture Research Society continues to expand its educational mission. DJ Vicar's lesson in the basics of turntablism at the meeting I attended in October 2010 is just one example of the kinds of events the group now regularly organizes. They also invite artists to lecture on a range of subjects, from their own approaches to performance to more erudite topics like sociopolitical dimensions of hip-hop in the United States.

The NTU Hip-Hop Culture Research Society has inspired the growth of similar organizations at other schools, as well. Many universities, especially in the island's major urban centers, now have hip-hop culture clubs or "black music societies" (*heiren yinyue she* 黑人音樂社) that are totally or partially dedicated to the study of rap and related genres like soul, funk, and R&B. For those who have graduated from college and moved on to jobs, there is an organization called H.O.O.D., an acronym for the (admittedly cryptic) phrase "Heaven of the Original Dream" that also conjures images of "the 'hood" of hip-hop renown. H.O.O.D. hosts activities at a number of venues around Taipei for members of the rap community, including periodic ciphers. In a cipher, a group of MCs gathers in a circle of three or more people[121] who take turns freestyling, that is, producing "imaginative rhymes instantaneously or [delivering] prepared rhymes in inventive ways." Although the activity is always on some level a mode of competition—to avoid losing face, one must perform at an equal or higher level than others in the circle—ciphers are often invoked as learning tools, safe spaces in which MCs can hone their craft. Like the NTU Society, H.O.O.D. also organizes lectures for its

[121] Keyes, *Rap Music*, 124.

members as well as for interested members of the general public. On April 17, 2010, I attended one such talk on the Soochow University (*Dongwu daxue* 東吳大學) campus in Taipei. Delivered by Chang Jui-chuan, it was advertised on the Internet with the very erudite title, "The Chinese Hip-Hop World and Rhyme Schemes in Mixed English-Chinese Rap" (*Huaren shijiede Hip-Hop shijie yu zhongyingwen hunhe raoshe yunjiao bianpai* 華人世界的HIP-HOP世界與中英文混合韻腳編排). The setting for Chang's lecture was similar to what I observed at NTU, wherein the classroom environment fostered an academic atmosphere in which attendees sat in reverential silence.



Figure 7: H.O.O.D. spokesperson introducing Chang Jui-chuan at his lecture on the Soochow University campus, 17 April 2010. Photo by author.

For two hours, we perched on a ragtag assortment of folding chairs amassed from various rooms around campus, listening intently to Chang speak about his early musical influences—from Michael Jackson to Guns N' Roses to Lim Giong—and his approach to rhyming in the Hoklo language. Befitting Chang's status as a university lecturer at

Chengchi University, he brought along a PowerPoint presentation and took questions from the students when he had finished speaking.

Universities, to which students matriculate at the age of 18 or 19 and at which they remain in residence for four years before moving on to jobs or graduate school, guarantee a continuous influx of new participants in the island's rap scene.[122] Moreover, those who join or take on leadership positions in clubs might remain in their roles as dedicated fans, but they might also progress upward through the ranks and achieve notoriety as amateur performers or even professionals. Although hip-hop studies as an academic discipline has yet to find a place in Taiwan's institutions of higher learning as a part of either music or American studies curricula, the infiltration of rap into university classrooms via clubs confers a sense of legitimacy on the community's activities. It also highlights the value of knowledge transmission as a central tenet of hip-hop, its critical fifth element.

Kung Fu Entertainment Headquarters

Learning activities are not confined to university settings but take place in a wide variety of other venues as well. In the previous section exploring localities, I discussed Kung Fu Entertainment's role as a locus of activity for the rap community in Tainan. In addition to organizing concerts and social activities, and maintaining a popular blog, the group also runs classes out of its headquarters in the center of town, in an alley near the busy intersection of Nanshiguohua Street and Minsheng Road. Theirs is a modest, mid-

[122] Scholars have also noted the vibrancy of hip-hop culture on college campuses in the United States. For one example, see Emery Petchauer, *Hip-Hop Culture in College Students' Lives: Elements, Embodiment, and Higher Edutainment* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

rise structure, shabby-looking from the outside in the way that most buildings in urban Taiwan are: clad in square tiles dingy from years without cleaning, draped with tattered awnings, and surrounded at the street level by haphazardly parked motor scooters.

I visited in September 2010, shortly after the group moved into the building. Their previous digs had grown too small to accommodate a growing number of students keen to learn how to rap under Dog G's tutelage, and they had in part been compelled to seek out a new place with more space for classes. Sophie, Dog G's manager and longtime girlfriend, apologized for the state of the facilities, which they had not yet had the opportunity to thoroughly clean and arrange to their liking. Things were a mess when Kung Fu Entertainment moved in, she explained, but the recent incursion of the brutal Typhoon Fanapi had exacerbated the sense of disorder and disrepair, breaking windows and leaving puddles of fetid water on the ground. The air was heavy with the smell of a number of stray cats, which the group had adopted and welcomed into the building. As I toured the facility, I traveled through a series of rooms that were sparsely furnished but clearly designed to serve flexibly as spaces for socializing, music-making, and conducting business. I interviewed Dog G in a room modestly outfitted with a couch, small refrigerator, and pedestal fan. Displayed on the wall beneath a flickering neon light was a group of photographs and drawings in frames, some featuring images of Dog G and other members of Kung Fu Entertainment, and others the group's favorite English-language slogans, "Hip Hop Ain't Dead, It Lives in Tainan" and "I Am the Taiwan Dream."



Figure 8: Art hung on the wall at Kung Fu Entertainment, an illustration of Dog G wearing a t-shirt that reads "HIP HOP AIN'T DEAD IT'S LIVE IN TAINAN." The text on the right translates as "Light of Taiwan" (*Taiwan zhiguang* 台灣之光). 26 September 2010. Photo by author.

One of the higher floors featured a room arrayed with chairs, a dedicated area for classes. Dog G did not set out to run a school when he started Kung Fu Entertainment in the early 2000s. At its beginnings, the organization was simply a group of friends who would occasionally go out, perhaps to a local teahouse or bookstore, to write songs together.[123] As Dog G began to take his career as a rapper more seriously and the association grew larger and more active, however, he began to look for a space to serve as a clubhouse, where members could compose songs and record with relative

[123] Dog G, personal interview.

convenience. In due course, he was approached by several outsiders who expressed a desire to study rap, and before long he was cast into the role of instructor. These days, Dog G doesn't personally teach students with any kind of regularity, but others in the organization do for a nominal fee. When I visited in 2010, Sophie remarked that the group was only able to accommodate ten students because they hadn't yet completed the move-in and cleaning processes, but they hoped to take on more soon enough.



Figure 9: Dog G at the Kung Fu Entertainment headquarters in Tainan, 26 September 2010. Photo by author.

Those who register for classes at Kung Fu Entertainment commit to coming to the building once a week on Saturdays, for two months at a time. Dog G views education as integral to the survival and prosperity of the Taiwan rap community, and participants in

Kung Fu Entertainment classes as prospective new group members. Some take their studies more seriously than others: "I hope all of them [want to be part of the group], but some of them are just in it for the fun of it, they want to give it a try. There are also some who just don't have the patience to really create something new."[124] Regardless of their intentions, Dog G sees the classes as a form of public service, providing youth with a structured alternative to illicit activity: "For the young ones, it's better than having them out drag racing, doing drugs."[125]

Although I did not have an opportunity to observe a class directly, Dog G described the process whereby students "prove [themselves]" and progress from level to level. After learning the basic tenets of rap and gaining confidence through exercises such as ciphers, students gradually begin to write and then workshop their material with classmates. Their success or failure in the program depends directly on the quality of the work they produce: "It's about your songs, it's about your performances. If they're good enough, then you can put them on the website, the Kung Fu Entertainment website. If they're not good enough, but you seem sincere and you can perform ok, then you can maybe perform at one of our shows."[126] Dog G describes a process whereby those keen to study rap begin their journey within the confines of the Kung Fu Entertainment headquarters, a safe space for incubating young talent. Once budding artists demonstrate a degree of maturity as judged by their elders in the organization, they are encouraged to

[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid.

move beyond the confines of the building to perform for the public, in the flesh or virtually through online presentation.

The Online Sphere: PTT

In addition to traditional geographical places, the virtual realm offers venues in which members of the community can create and consume knowledge. Scholars writing about rap in a variety of global contexts have noted the power of the Internet in nurturing the growth of local hip-hop communities, undermining the power of mainstream record companies, and mediating the transnational movement of the music and associated cultural products among artists and audiences.[127] The online sphere harnesses similar power in Taiwan, where artists and audiences in search of information, camaraderie, and feedback log numerous hours on websites and Bulletin Board Systems.

In a conversation about the so-called "Cross-Strait Rap War," a battle for musical and ideological dominance between Taiwan- and China-based underground rappers set off by an on-court scuffle among members of the two national basketball teams, rapper Ill Mo suggested I head to "3542" and "3595" for more information. Although I was at first puzzled, I quickly discerned that these digits referred not to MC aliases or some kind of serial code, but to the identification numbers of posts written and archived on the Bulletin Board System known as PTT. Tightly intertwined with the development of the rap scene, PTT has embedded itself in the communal memory to the extent that community

[127] See, for example, Elaine Richardson and Sean Lewis, "'Flippin the Script'/'Blowin Up the Spot': Puttin' Hip-Hop Online in (African) America and South Africa," in *Global Literacies and the World Wide Web*, ed. Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe (New York: Routledge), 251-276; and Mattar Yasser, "Virtual communities and Hip-Hop Music Consumers in Singapore: Interplaying Global, Local and Subcultural Identities," in *Leisure Studies* 22, no. 4 (Oct., 2003): 283-300.

members often describe given events or phenomena with recourse to an article or thread on the Board. Reading the posts that Ill Mo recommended—which contained links to songs written during the war, lyrics, and reader assessments of their quality, meaning, and significance to the community—I gleaned that PTT represented yet another crucial place of learning and sharing about rap for participants in the scene.

Even as I immediately recognized the ongoing vitality of this resource, I was struck by the apparent age of the system, evident not just in the wealth of information archived there, which went back more than a decade, but also in the crudeness of its interface: run on a Linux system platform, PTT is characterized by blocky white text, a solid black background, 8-bit graphics, and the complete absence of any rich media. To some degree, PTT looks ancient because it *is* ancient, at least by the warp-speed standards of those accustomed to 21st-century computing and Internet-based social networking. Almost two decades after its inception in 1995 as a National Taiwan University student initiative, however, it remains the island's premiere information and communication technology for high school and college students, as well as recent graduates.[128] The PTT Hip-Hop Bulletin Board (*xiha kanban* 嘻哈看板) formed in 2001, a period that coincided with what many rappers in Taiwan refer to as a golden age, a time of prodigious activity and creative ferment in the musical underground. They used PTT as the successor technology to the Master U forum to seek one another out, disseminate information about upcoming performances, exchange thoughts on recordings, and debate

[128] PTT was founded by students from the Department of Information Engineering, but an extra-curricular organization called the Electronic BBS Research Society (*Taiwan daxue dianzi bugao lan xitong yanjiu she* 台灣大學電子佈告欄系統研究社) currently manages the system.

the musical ethos and ideological imperatives of a localized rap style. In the process, they also created a rich repository of fan- and musician-generated discourse archived specifically for future study by community members. Indeed, the more than 9,000 articles available on PTT represent perhaps the most robust documentation available of the community's past and present.

By way of background, a BBS is "a computer system used as an information source and forum for a particular interest group…[functioning] somewhat like a stand-alone Web site, but without graphics."[129] Initially accessible only by dial-up connection, Bulletin Board Systems originated in the United States in the late 1970s and dominated until the early 1990s, when the World Wide Web emerged as the primary technique for online communications. In the West, the term "BBS" still refers specifically to systems accessed via a terminal program, but in the Sinophone world a BBS is simply a public online forum, Web-based or otherwise, wherein users can "share and exchange information, chat with community members, [and] make friends."[130]

Open-source and not-for-profit, PTT is an expansive terminal-based Bulletin Board System with more than 1.5 million registered users who publish over forty thousand articles and a million comments each day.[131] The largest BBS in the Sinophone world, it also encompasses chat, mail, and game functions, catering to those who are, on average, twenty-five years of age and logged into the system for multiple hours on a daily

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[129] Liwen Jin, "Chinese Online BBS Sphere: What BBS Has Brought to China" (master's thesis, MIT, 2008), 10, http://cms.mit.edu/research/theses/LiwenJin2008.pdf.

[130] Ibid.

[131] "What Is PTT?" accessed March 7, 2011, http://www.ptt.cc/index.html.

basis.[132] Users—also called "villagers" (*xiangmin* 鄉民)—visit boards with a wide variety of themes, among which more than a hundred focus exclusively on popular music, including Cantopop, China-Rock, J-pop, and K-pop.[133] They can choose to read, author, or comment on articles; they can also provide positive or negative feedback on the works of others using the shorthand "push" or "recommend" (*tui* 推) and "hiss" or "do not recommend" (*xu* 噓). Like many information and communication technologies, PTT manifests an imbrication of on- and offline worlds. Although registration for the system is open and the service is free, villagers are required to provide their real names and identifying information to administrators, who are liable to report that information in the event that legal action is brought against a villager for a crime committed on the boards. Indeed, very little of what transpires on PTT is truly anonymous: the Hip-Hop Board community is roughly isomorphic with the offline rap community in Taiwan; users will often arrange face-to-face meetings, and most will not hesitate to reveal their given names or other identifying information in messages. In numerous interviews, research associates directed me to other Board members by providing their PTT handles, real names, and school or professional affiliations.

A peer-appointed moderator, called a *banzhu* (版主), exercises the right to periodically clean up a given board, removing posts that have received more hisses than pushes and sequestering articles he or she deems especially noteworthy in a separate

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[132] User statistics—from average user age to average user astrological sign—are available in the "Announce" section on PTT.

[133] The term *xiangmin* is a reference to Hong Kong comedian Stephen Chow's film *Hail the Judge* (*Jiupin zhimaguan* 九品芝麻官) and refers to characters in the film who habitually follow others or exhibit a mob mentality.

"Best Of" section called the *jinghuaqu* (精華區).[134] Teacher Lin, who goes by the handle "holicane," posted more than 150 articles between 2001 and 2009 that remain in the *jinghuaqu*. Among these are accounts of the development of both American and Taiwan rap styles, ruminations on the spread of global hip-hop, and numerous album reviews. The *jinghuaqu* is also home to some of Lin's more imaginative and incisive pieces, including one he characterizes as a "comparative study of Ebonics and the words that are used in the traditional Chinese novel *The Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳) the purpose of which was to "translate traditional Chinese poetry" into the language of Western-style rap music.[135] Other materials in the *jinghuaqu* provide information on foundational hip-hop precepts like sampling, graffiti, and break dance, and a number of "hot threads"—postings that provoked memorable or productive discussion among villagers—are also preserved there. Current threads, some of which might very well be selected for archiving, include a request by a villager for help with beat-making (#8790), and evaluations of new releases by mainland Chinese rappers Crazy.C, Aldric, and C-Block (#8798), and Taiwan-based Bad Kids (*Etong* 惡童) (#8789).

Prior to posting new articles, asking questions, or participating in existing conversations, new users are expected to first familiarize themselves with the materials in the *jinghuaqu* and on the Board proper, to observe the community's style of discourse and get a sense of its history. As Teacher Lin explained to me, those who pose a question or express an opinion without first gaining some knowledge of what has come before do

[134] Research associates have also referred to the *jinghuaqu* in English as the "historical archive" and "juicy section."

[135] Teacher Lin, personal interview.

so at their own peril: "I think newcomers, that would be very helpful for newcomers. And it's even becoming a way to attack newcomers, like if they ask some question which is perceived as stupid…people will say 'you didn't look at the [*jinghuaqu*]?'" The threat of public castigation has in the past created a hostile environment, Lin explained, such that "people [are sometimes] afraid to post opinions on the Hip-Hop Board because…they'll be attacked, you're ignorant."[136] A sense of intimidation is palpable in the language used in many posts, which reveal a clear social order among villagers: new PTT users or those less familiar with hip-hop refer to themselves as "new hands" (*xinshou* 新手), and address their inquiries with deference to the Board's "great ones" (*dada* 大大), who have mastered or authored materials in the *jinghuaqu* or otherwise demonstrated depth of knowledge.

Measured against the sophistication of today's social networking sites, terminal-based BBS in many ways resemble technological relics.[137] But far from having vanished in the wake of Facebook, systems like PTT continue to thrive throughout the Chinese-speaking world. Their persistence may at first glance suggest a phenomenon described by Marshall McLuhan as the "reversal of the overheated medium," in which media types

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[136] Ibid.

[137] In spite of some common features, Bulletin Board Systems are distinct from the SNS, or "social networking sites," that have attained popularity over the last five years in Europe and North America. SNS are "web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, to articulate a list of other users with whom they share connections, and to view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system." Simply put, where Bulletin Board Systems cohere around discussion topics, social networking sites place users at their center. See Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 1, article 11 (2007). Quoted in Jin, "Chinese Online BBS," 9.

that "cross-fertilize" eventually transgress "break boundaries" after which they become overextended and prompt a reversal to more fundamental technologies.[138] Within this model, the use of PTT might represent a retreat from "overheated" Web-based social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, and Plurk (a microblogging service similar to Twitter). It is more accurate to say, however, that terminal-based BBS simply never went out of style in Taiwan; it has been a constant presence on the island since the 1980s and remains a technology in use alongside and in combination with social networking sites.

The fixity of this rather archaic system can be understood in terms of several specific advantages it confers upon users, who emphasize its speed, efficiency, and ease of use. As Hong Qingqi (洪欽碁), a computer scientist and active member of the Hip-Hop Board, explained to me in a Facebook message, PTT attracts and retains users not in spite of its austerity, but because of it:

> Compared to Web pages, BBS is very simple and plain (without any images or pictures). I think it helps to make readers focus on every word. I know many good writers [who'd rather] write articles on BBS than on a blog. I think good writers sometimes also mean experienced writers. They like old stuff. Maybe that's one of the reasons they stay on BBS…When this wisdom stays in BBS, I think their followers stay, too. It's kind of like a tradition.[139]

Hong's statement alludes to another quality of PTT that is both a cause and effect of its longevity: that "old stuff" accumulates within the system over time, such that it comes to serve as a storehouse of "wisdom" for current and future users. It is perhaps for this reason more than any other that the Hip-Hop Board on PTT lends itself to a discussion

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[138] Marshall McLuhan, *Essential McLuhan*, ed. Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone (New York: BasicBooks, 1995), 169-174.

[139] Hong Qingqi 洪欽碁, Facebook correspondence with author, 24 September 2010.

about places of learning: many of those who make use of the system do so with the explicit objective of expanding their knowledge of rap music, starting out as "new hands," dedicating themselves to studying the *jinghuaqu*, and perhaps eventually emerging as "great ones."

In the course of my research, PTT has been a critical resource for learning about Taiwan rap, but I was surprised to find in May 2010 that my work on the island had actually earned me a place in the lore of the community. An announcement of a colloquium I was giving at the Academia Sinica's Institute of Ethnology appeared on the Hip-Hop Board, posted by Fan Chiang of Kou Chou Ching:



Figure 10: Screen capture of posting on PTT Hip-Hop Board announcing the author's talk at the Academia Sinica, posted 13 May 2010.

The posting translated as follows:

> Perhaps there are on this message board some friends who are engaged similarly in creative work, who have been

> interviewed by this Harvard graduate student. On 6/1, she'll present her experiences [studying the community] at the Academia Sinica Institute of Ethnology. This young woman is quite diligent, spending much time observing and recording Taiwan's rap scene. I hope everyone can come and cheer her on.

Below, he listed the details of the talk title, time, place, and contact information. I was moved by Fan Chiang's efforts to bring people to the Academia Sinica and thrilled that PTT had generated an opportunity for me to contribute to the community's active intellectual life. At the event itself, I noticed only a handful of recognizable faces in the audience, including Ill Mo and several individuals I had previously run into at performances. Regardless, it was thrilling to see my work represented on the Hip-Hop Board—in essence, to be granted admission by the community's gatekeepers to a place reserved for its most serious and committed students.

Places of Production

In "'Living underground is tough': Authenticity and Locality in the Hip-hop Community in Istanbul, Turkey," musicologist Thomas Solomon writes that members of the Turkish hip-hop community "spend much discursive time speaking and rapping about how the Turkish hip-hop movement is underground […] This spatial metaphor has thus become central to local constructions of hip-hop in Istanbul."[140] In this context, "the underground" may refer to several qualities or activities, including music that is "not commercially released on CD or cassette, but circulated through other means";[141] a

[140] Thomas Solomon, "'Living Underground is Tough': Authenticity and Locality in the Hip-Hop Community in Istanbul, Turkey," *Popular Music* 24, no. 1 (Jan., 2005): 3.

[141] Ibid., 4.

"'hardcore' style" or "attitude";[142] and "participation in illegal or quasi-legal activities."[143] Although often used interchangeably with "independent" (*duli* 獨立) in the discourse surrounding rap in Taiwan, the term "underground" (*dixia* 地下) possesses meanings similar to those described by Solomon. The Taiwan underground emerged as a space of resistance to martial law-era strictures on the creation and distribution of a wide variety of cultural products deemed by the government to exhibit "socialist or communist tendencies" or to contain "absurdity, weirdness, obscenity, violence, rudeness, frivolity, sarcasm, melancholy, decadence or unclear motifs."[144] To go "underground" was to act in a spirit of opposition to these rules, to subvert the KMT's agenda through producing or consuming illegal radio broadcasts, clandestine newspapers, or black market media. The term gradually shed its specific association with opposition politics when the island transitioned from one-party rule to multi-party democracy during the late 1980s and 1990s. As music critic Ma Shih-fang has written, "underground" was invoked at that time as a catchall to describe non-mainstream, non-state-sanctioned popular culture:

> At the end of the 1980s, after the lifting of martial law in 1987, things originally suppressed as taboo were all of a sudden permitted to circulate. That time thus gave rise to a particular phenomenon: liberalization on paper could not keep pace with the creativity that actually emerged. So the 'underground' came to refer to everything outside of the

[142] Ibid., 6.

[143] Ibid., 7.

[144] Pat Gao, "Music, Interrupted," *Taiwan Review*, November 1, 2007, accessed March 6, 2013, http://taiwanreview.nat.gov.tw/ct.asp?CtNode=119&xItem=24780.

> 'aboveground' systems represented by the three [state-operated] television stations and two newspapers.[145]

Although "underground" no longer necessarily signifies illegal activity in Taiwan, the term nevertheless continues to evoke a general counter-cultural ethos inherited from martial law days.

More recently, the term "underground" has acquired a more literal, emplaced meaning specific to the Taiwan context. In *Indie Band* (*Dixia Haoyue* 地下好樂), a 2008 primer on the island's underground music scene, author Xu Yifan (許逸凡) writes that underground music generally has some or all of the following characteristics: it is stylistically "opposed to the mainstream" or "avant-garde" (*fanzhuliude, xianfengpaide* 反主流的，先鋒派的), "secret" (*mimide* 祕密的) or "not public" (*bugongkaide* 不公開的), and/or performed in a space that is *physically* underground (*dimianxiade* 地面下的).[146] Xu's last criterion interprets "underground" as a spatial imperative, a response to the tremendous density of Taiwan's urban development and the need for musicians to be sensitive to their neighbors: When performing underground, "it is important to consider volume control in order not to disturb the neighbors and to avoid getting fined—if a band wants to stay in business it must take care of sound insulation."[147] This quality is evident in the designs of a number of live performance venues in Taipei, including The Wall and

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[145] Ma Shih-fang 馬世芳, "Taiwan duli yinyuede qiyuan" 台灣獨立音樂的起源 [The origins of Taiwan independent music], November 1, 2011, accessed March 22, 2011, http://ystaiwan-epaper.blogspot.com/2010/11/blog-post.html.

[146] Xu Yifan 許逸凡, *Dixia haoyue: renshi dixia yinyuede di yiben shu* 地下好樂：認識地下音樂的第一本書 [Indie band: The first book about underground music] (Taipei: Darenguan, 2008), 49.

[147] Ibid.

the now-defunct Underworld, whose logo was an illustration of stairs leading down to a basement. In the decades after the end of martial law and the crest of the Taiwan Miracle, a period that saw rapid expansion of the island's major cities, the "undergroundness" of music is not only about its oppositional spirit, but also its location within the physical strata of urban life. In both senses, rap music exists, whether by design or by accident, on the margins of both the music industry and of the city itself.

The places discussed thus far in this chapter acquire a more intelligible pattern when viewed through the lens of marginality or undergroundness. Campus classrooms provide a home for hip-hop clubs on the fringes of academic activity; Kung Fu Entertainment occupies a dilapidated building standing inconspicuously among its neighbors in Tainan; concerts coalesce in open lots, advertised not through mainstream media but by word of mouth and through online portals like PTT. In closing this chapter, I explore more fully the places where the production of Taiwan's rap music takes place, with particular attention to their marginality or undergroundness. To some extent, all the places I have explored thus far can be categorized as "places of production." The music is, after all, a product of localities like Taipei and Tainan, and the various places of learning discussed all bear witness to acts of creation. Here I further extend the discourse to include places whose primary function is to facilitate recording, distribution, and live performance. I begin by providing a brief tour of two studio spaces located in the homes of rappers Shortee and Mr. Brown. Situated in private residences, these places are underground in the sense of being removed from the public eye and not affiliated with any particular label or commercial entity. Next, I describe a store tucked unobtrusively into a corner of a Ximending shopping center that traffics in recordings by obscure

foreign and domestic rap acts. I conclude by returning to the site of the "921.87 Benefit Concert," focusing on Kung Fu Entertainment's takeover of a dilapidated lot in the middle of the city for performance.

Two Studios in Taipei's Dongqu

Shortee, an MC with the Tripoets as well as an independent DJ, has a small but generously outfitted recording studio sequestered in his apartment in the Dongqu area of Taipei. His home is large by local standards, with a full kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, and a comfortable sitting area. Although we have never discussed financial matters, a vast collection of vinyl and CDs neatly arrayed on numerous shelves, in addition to the impressive size of the space, suggest that the musician is a man of considerable means. When I visited in April 2010, Shortee was collaborating with Ill Mo, his partner in the Tripoets, on Mo's yet-to-be-released solo EP. The song they were slated to work on that day, provisionally called "Blood," describes the experience of feeling a needle in one's arm and features a clever narrative sleight-of-hand: at first, the lyrics suggest that the speaker is a drug addict indulging in his latest fix; by the final verse, however, it becomes clear that the piece is actually about the selfless act of donating blood. At this early stage, the musical accompaniment was sparse—a generic beat and instrumental that I forgot as soon as I heard it—and I could only imagine how the completed composition would sound when it was no longer a simple sketch.

As Mo prepared to record, he invited me into the studio space, which was outfitted with mint-green walls padded with black acoustic insulation foam. Shortee took a seat at a petite recording console, comprising an eight-channel mixer hooked up to a Mac running ProTools HD software and a piano keyboard tucked beneath a computer

keyboard. Mo entered a small isolation booth abutting the console, which Shortee could view through a six-inch closed-circuit television monitor sitting on the desk. Mo had already laid down one vocal track and, for the next hour, attempted to record a second that was perfectly synced to the first. This technique, sometimes referred to as "overdubbing," "double tracking" or "stacking vocals," is common in rap and used to enhance the presence of the voice, to make it sound fuller and richer.[148] It is frequently employed in Taiwan, not only on recordings but also in shows where musicians perform live atop pre-recorded tracks. Outside the booth, Shortee monitored the progress of the new recording as it unfolded both through a sound system and on the computer screen.

It was a struggle. Mo would record a few bars, perhaps reach the end of a verse, and then Shortee would stop him and provide a brief critique, sometimes about his flow, pacing, and breath control, sometimes about the relative success or failure of the syncing process. Occasionally, Mo would hear himself fall out of step with the underlying track and take the initiative to halt the recording. The pair seemed to have an easy back and forth, and their encounter was focused but casual. Once things reached a natural conclusion and it was clear that no additional progress would be made for the day, Mo exited the booth, heaved a sigh of relief, and sat down for some water and conversation. It was a very different atmosphere from what I had observed in commercial recording studios in Taipei and elsewhere: there, the high hourly cost of studio time generates a pressure to produce on a particular timetable, and artists, producers, and sound engineers all keep their eyes fixed to the clock to avoid incurring unexpected overages.

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[148] Paul Edwards, *How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-Hop MC* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), 282.



Figure 11: Shortee at his home studio working with Ill Mo, who is visible on the small monitor to the right, 30 April 2010. Photo by the author.

Several months later, in August 2010, I visited a second home studio in the Dongqu area that felt similarly sequestered and absent the senses of tension and commotion that so often permeate commercial studios. This one belonged to Mr. Brown, one half of the rap-rock duo Da Ximen, and was located in a quiet mid-rise building near the posh Breeze Center mall. After entering at the ground floor, I climbed perhaps five flights of stairs to reach Brown's apartment. He then led me through the front door and up another very steep, very narrow staircase to a little annex that housed his studio. Whereas Shortee's place had been spare, orderly, and impeccably clean—the rapper requested that I leave the guava and crackers I had been snacking on outside the studio before entering—Brown's was chaotic and stuffed to the gills with personal items. Books, records, photographs, and toys were strewn everywhere. A large, English-language "Parental Advisory: Explicit Content" sign stuck to the wall exuded youthful

belligerence.[149] On a bookshelf, a white satin-lined box contained a Golden Melody Award, which Da Ximen had won in the category of "Best Vocal Group" at the ceremonies held earlier that summer. I asked Brown if he ever intended to display it and he looked around the room as if to reply, "Where in this mess would it possibly go?"

The recording studio was divided into three areas. At its center sat a console, comprising two computers, a piano keyboard, speakers, and an eight-channel mixer. In front of the console, visible through a large glass window, was a sizable isolation booth. On the day I visited, an acoustic guitar lay on the ground by a tall stool and mic stand, beneath which were crumpled several used tissues. Behind the console I spied a small sitting area with a couch, coffee table, and bookshelves groaning with additional equipment—amplifiers, cameras, another eight-channel mixer, CDs, and records. Just behind the door separating the console from the isolation booth, Brown had secured a large sheet of white paper to the wall with tape to chart Da Ximen's progress recording their last album, 2009's *X*. In the leftmost of five columns were the names of ten track names scribbled in thick, black magic marker, then the statuses—all "done"—of "music" (*qu* 曲), "lyrics" (*ci* 詞), "beat," and something else that had been scratched out. The album had already been out for more than a year by the time I visited the studio space—it was, in fact, the recording that had won Da Ximen their Golden Melody Award—but

[149] Several research associates mentioned the "Parental Advisory: Explicit Content" label, produced by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), as an important symbol for the Taiwan rap community. Many rap albums imported to Taiwan bear the label and community members spoke of using it as a means of identifying recordings they might want to purchase. For more information on the Parental Advisory Label, see http://www.riaa.com/toolsforparents.php?content_selector=parental_advisory#background.



Figure 12: Mr. Brown in his home studio, 27 August 2010. Photo by author.

Brown kept the chart up, perhaps as a reminder of past efforts and victories. Although I did not have the opportunity to observe Brown using the studio, I was intrigued by the extent to which he had individualized the space and imprinted it with his own style. Studded with mementos and trinkets, it was a temple to the rapper's personal memories and tastes.

Both Shortee's and Mr. Brown's home studios reflect a truism long understood by hip-hop scholars: rap, as a heavily technologically-mediated genre, requires places devoted to housing the elaborate technological resources upon which musicians rely. Born of necessity, these places in turn generate the do-it-yourself attitude often associated with underground production. Although cheap multitrack recording equipment is

ubiquitous in today's marketplace and amateur artists can successfully produce recordings using inexpensive desktop software like Garage Band, more elaborate home studios are something of a hip-hop community tradition. In *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, ethnomusicologist Cheryl Keyes notes that, particularly in the early days: "As they garnered reputations among their peers, many DJs began recording local artists in their converted basement studios, a choice made for both aesthetic and financial reasons. Along with microphones, turntables, samplers, drum machines, and a keyboard synthesizer, a typical basement studio may have anywhere from an eight- to a twenty-four track mixing board and a computer with MIDI capability."[150] I question whether owning and operating a home studio is a financially expedient choice in today's Taiwan. The fact that both Shortee and Mr. Brown reside in Dongqu, one of the more expensive parts of the city, indicates that neither is under the financial duress that many of rap's South Bronx pioneers were. Regardless, their setups suggest fidelity to the DIY hip-hop lifestyle as Keyes describes it: possessing one's own equipment promises a degree of artistic autonomy and control that is harder to come by in commercial studio settings. Professional sound engineers accustomed to working in rock or pop genres may struggle to produce the "grimy" or "dirty" sound qualities that many rap artists have historically preferred.[151] Moreover, the time constraints associated with renting commercial studio space may hamper the creative process for artists more inclined to work slowly and experimentally.

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[150] Keyes, *Rap Music*, 148. The rise of the home studio, sometimes referred to as a project studio, was enabled by the development of relatively cheap multitrack recording equipment during the 1980s and affordable, user-friendly audio-recording computer software during the 1990s and 2000s.

[151] Ibid.

Certainly there are musicians who find ways to do work in commercial facilities, possibly with support from an independent record label. The Tripoets, Witness, and MJ116, for example, are represented by MC Hotdog's True Color label and have recorded at that company's studios in Taipei. I call particular attention to Shortee's and Mr. Brown's home outfits, however, in order to highlight the nature of Taiwan rap as a project frequently undertaken through personal initiative, the fruit of personal financial investment. As discussed earlier in this chapter, record labels are reluctant to underwrite rap for a variety of reasons, including its sometimes-oppositional politics, penchant for profane language, and a generally anemic market that is primarily interested in Mandopop. It is therefore often up to artists to produce their own material and forge their own paths, out from the margins and up from the underground.

Rhymewave: A Music Store in Miniature

Artists are supported in their efforts by an array of community members, particularly those who work, usually with scant financial reward, to promote and distribute Taiwan rap to consumers. Although Eslite (*Chengpin* 誠品), the largest book seller on the island, does carry local rap, a small number of specialist independent retailers who have personal involvements with the scene have attempted to provide consumers with a more curated, personalized buying experience. One such retailer is Rhymewave, a small music shop located in Ximending, which is part-owned and operated by Danny Wang (*Wang Weixiang* 王韋翔), a 32-year-old office worker from Taipei. He is a longtime participant in the Taiwan rap scene, having joined the NTU Hip-Hop Culture Research Society when he was still a student at Ocean University (*Haiyang daxue* 海洋大學) in Keelung. We were introduced to one another by Shortee, who came

to know Danny through the Society as well as through his regular contributions to the PTT Hip-Hop Board.

Not a performer by nature, Danny had long harbored a desire to become involved in the rap scene by other means. For several years, Shortee ran a hip-hop specialty record store called Da Project (*Da jihua* 大計劃), and Danny would often stop by to socialize and offer help wherever it was needed. In the process of studying for his MBA at Queensland University of Technology in Australia, Danny had made the store the subject of one of his graduate research projects, ultimately writing a paper exploring how he might approach the task of marketing rap to local consumers. When Da Project closed in 2007, he decided to start his own venture. Although he knew it was unlikely to be very profitable, he was confident that he could keep a small operation afloat and that it would provide him with an enriching creative outlet and perhaps some extra pocket money. To move forward, he partnered with a woman by the name of Kidmen Wu, an R&B enthusiast who worked at the Jiajia Record Store (*Jiajia changpian* 佳佳唱片) in Taipei Main Station. Kidmen is well known to many in the rap community because Jiajia imports a small amount of underground hip-hop from the US and Japan, but she and Danny became acquainted through PTT. They met in the flesh for the first time in September 2007 at a PTT social event and decided to start Rhymewave, both to import "quality independent Black music" from overseas and sell local underground rap and R&B artists.

At first, Rhymewave was purely an Internet-based business, and Danny saw it more as a means of connecting with other rap fans than a means of making money. He launched a series of weekly meetings at his house, somewhat resembling Tupperware

parties, to play albums and get people interested in his products: "[I thought] even if they don't buy, it's ok. Because I didn't have a [brick-and-mortar] shop, what I did was post the information on BBS and ask people if they want to share…Because at that time I already set up the name and people know that I imported stuff, and I asked them to come to my house to listen to music and also chat. Luckily, people did come." So many people, in fact, that his parents soon began to ask about the stream of strangers parading through their living room on weekends, which prompted Danny and Kidmen to seek out a physical storefront. After taking on a third partner—whom Danny refers to as "Prexeede," his handle on PTT—and a short stint selling at the night market near National Taiwan Normal University, they got in touch with one of Kidmen's family friends, who ran a shop selling luxury handbags in the middle of Ximending. They approached her about renting a small part of her storefront, and she agreed. By June 2008, they had moved their stock of CDs into one slim display case, surrounded by second-hand Louis Vuitton and Gucci purses. Most of Rhymewave's meager business is still conducted online through Internet auction websites, but they maintain the display case in Ximending for the purposes of remaining in physical contact with their buyers: "What we do is we will go…between 5 to 10pm and it's like a pick-up place…People don't have to come to my place, but I can go there and we can play music and we can chat. Because the rent is really small, we're able to continue." Danny notes that there were, at one point, about five independent stores in Taipei selling rap music, but all have closed. Rhymewave's unique business model, and the fact that Danny and his partners have other incomes, enables their survival in a challenging market.



Figure 13: The Rhymewave display case in Ximending, 8 March 2010. Photos by author.

Danny is passionate about rap music, both local and global varieties, and he does his best to offer unusual and hard-to-find products through Rhymewave. When I visited his store in March 2010, I reached into the case and grabbed four or five albums that I had not seen on my frequent trips to Eslite and Jiajia—older recordings, EPs, mixtapes. The little case seemed to me a treasure chest full of surprising and, in some cases, quite spectacular gems. Because of his dedication to supporting the Taiwan scene, Danny tries to reach out to local artists to see how he can be of help in bringing their music to Rhymewave's customers: "I don't charge them, and if they have free CDs to give away, it's okay." He sells Kou Chou Ching, Soft Lipa, and Dog G along with whatever he can get his hands on from overseas indie labels like Rawkus, ABB Records, Battle Axe

Records, and Fatbeats. The business is not lucrative, but he feels personally gratified by the new relationships he has forged operating it.

An Open Lot in Tainan, Site of the "921.87 Benefit Concert"

As I turn to the stage, Dog G announces the debut of a new song written expressly for this concert with R&B singer/producer J. Wu, called "Unforgettable Pain" (Wu wang shangtong 勿忘傷痛).[152] *It is a melancholy piece that describes in painstaking detail the human suffering wrought by Typhoon Morakot as well as the many kindnesses remitted by volunteers in the days following the storm. The screens flanking the stage show the music video that Kung Fu Entertainment has produced for the song, which begins with footage that has been running on a loop on the island's news channels: the Jinshuai Hotel collapsing utterly—unbelievably—into the churning Zhiben River. Then more images from news programs of the mudslides, rushing floodwaters, rescue crews attempting to pull victims from harm's way. It has been a month and a half since the typhoon, and Dog G asks the audience if we've already begun to forget the storm. If we have, he says, this song will help us to remember.*

"Unforgettable Pain" is a mid-tempo piece, clearly composed quickly but thoughtfully by its authors for this event. Dog G's typically complex rhythm and rhyme schemes have been replaced by simpler end-rhyming couplets delivered in a regular fashion with respect to the established metrical unit. The rapper's voice has a sandpapery texture, but J. Wu is all smooth soulfulness on a sung chorus as he vows to soothe victims:

[152] Dog G 大支 and J. Wu, "Wu wang shangtong" 勿忘傷痛 [Unforgettable pain], independent release, 2009, compact disc.

山河大地被風雨撕裂
哭喊的我的兄弟姊妹
我讓你依慰 讓你依慰
記不記得一起祈禱的那一夜
擦肩而過的志工你是哪一位
那一天
看見 不一樣的美麗新世界

the mountains and rivers were torn apart by the wind and rain
the crying of my brothers and sisters
I will comfort you, will comfort you
do you remember the night we prayed together
among the volunteers rubbing shoulders, which one were you
on that day
I saw a new and different beautiful world

The chorus begins with a description of the storm's violence, but ends with the suggestion that Morakot has also brought out the best in people, especially those who have volunteered to help out in hard-hit areas. Accompaniment to Dog G and J. Wu's voices is sparse, just a simple drum track and brief piano riff consisting of a descending five-note figure. This is layered atop the repeating sample of a vocalist performing a recognizably Aboriginal melody, a reminder that many of those affected hailed from the island's indigenous communities. The sound of the performance reverberates throughout the space, and everyone sways gently.

As Dog G wraps up his set, I remember just how tired I am. It is late evening now, the sky is completely dark, and I have been standing in this lot in the center of Tainan for almost eight hours. As I begin to move away from the stage once again towards the exit to the street, I sense light ahead in the distance. I search for the source of the glow, and as I walk towards it, I see that it's coming from the ground: about a dozen young men are patiently lighting hundreds of candles on the pavement, arranged in the shape of Taiwan. Candlelight vigils are fairly common on the island, often invoked to

commemorate natural disasters and human tragedies. Several weeks after Morakot the weather is still volatile, however, and the vigil seems a poor choice of public display given the blustery conditions. As gusts of wind blow the candles out over and over, the candle-lighters are unfazed. They rush to rekindle extinguished flames such that the borders of the island are constantly receding into the darkness and then reappearing as if by magic. It strikes me that this simple gesture epitomizes Taiwan's vulnerability in the aftermath of the greatest storm in fifty years. It is melancholy yet uplifting, a clear message from these young men that they will keep vigil when the candles blow out, even in times of catastrophe.

What had seemed in the daylight a run-down piece of unused property in the middle of the city now feels completely different. This lot is more than just a lot—it is a theater, a temple, a graveyard. It is a place of gathering for the rap community, which they have tattooed with candles and sounds.



Figure 14: Candles arranged in the shape of Taiwan at the "921.87 Benefit Concert," 27 September 2009. Photo by author.

Part Three

The Politics of Storytelling in Taiwan

"All tracks in this album are based on true stories."

-Liner notes to Kou Chou Ching's *What's Happening*[1]

"This one right here, goes out to my one and only,
This is our story, our story."

-Witness, "Our Story"[2]

In Part One of this dissertation, I approached the history of rap music in Taiwan in terms of its diverse guises as *xiha*, *raoshe*, and *liām-kua*. In addition to shedding light on rap's flexibility as a conceptual category, this exercise revealed explanations of the music's origins on the island as themselves narrative constructions, subject to the revisions and reinterpretations of different authors. Part Two posited the rap community as an interpretive community and rap storytelling as a relational act, a means of constructing intersubjective bridges for the purposes of sharing a narrated world. I provided ethnographic description of the various people and places at play in the scene to examine ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic representation among the "song readers" and those to whom they read their songs. Narrativity has unfolded as a prominent theme throughout this study, but I have thus far gestured only obliquely at the ways in which rap

[1] Kou Chou Ching 拷秋勤, *Fashengle shenme shi*? 發生了甚麼事？ [What's happening?], independent release, 2012, compact disc.

[2] Witness 黃崇旭, "Womende gushi" 我們的故事 [Our story], *Huang Chongxu* 黃崇旭 [Witness], Rock Records, 2005, compact disc.

actually functions as storytelling music. In Part Three, I move beyond telling stories *about* the music and its makers to focus on the stories that rappers tell and the means by which they tell them.

In the following pages, I engage Taiwan rap as a storytelling genre not only because of its identity as such, but also because, as I noted in the introduction to this dissertation, I believe that hearing songs as stories is critical to understanding the means by which the music is constituted as meaningful to artists and audiences on the island. Since rap's emergence as part of the stylistically diverse New Taiwan Song at the end of the 1980s, it has been an important venue for storytelling, alongside film and literature. I argued in Part One that the storytelling quality of American hip-hop and its resemblance to traditional narrative forms was a central aspect of what first drew musicians like Blacklist Workshop and Jutoupi to rap. As the epigraphs to this chapter suggest, today's performers manifest a similarly intense desire to tell stories. In the following pages, I examine works that reflect or construct larger narratives about Taiwan as a nation, as well as those that engage smaller, more specifically contextual narratives, such as personal accounts of relationships, family, school, and work. I deploy examples of both types of narratives—the grand and the local, to invoke Jean-François Lyotard's terminology[3]—in order to illustrate two key insights. First, although martial law ended a quarter-century ago, some rap artists have continued to write against the grain of the KMT's martial law-era metanarratives, advocating for recognition of Taiwan's unique history and the diverse linguistic and cultural practices of its multiethnic population. Though not specifically

[3] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

anti-western, these artists warn of the perils of Euro-American cultural imperialism; environmentalism and attention to other local social and economic problems form additional loci of their engagement with politics. Second, that some rap artists demur from engaging overtly political issues to tell smaller stories—personal stories—may in and of itself constitute a protest against or denial of the incursion of politics into everyday life after the end of martial law. In other words, to make music about relationships, family, school, and career is to reaffirm of the importance of personal experience in the face of the more strident, totalizing metanarratives, both historical and emergent, that have dominated the public and political discourses since the mid-twentieth century. I summon Michael D. Jackson's "politics of storytelling" in exploring both of these kinds of narratives, keeping in mind the role that stories can play in empowering storytellers to "[reinvent] ourselves and [authorize] notions, both individual and collective, of who we are."[4]

Up to now, I have used the terms "narrative" and "story" more or less interchangeably, but my methodology for unpacking the tales that Taiwan's rappers tell and the means by which they tell them benefits from more rigorous explanation from this point forward. Traditional definitions of "narrative" from literary studies tend toward the rigid, stipulating that a narrative must be "a telling of some true or fictitious event or connected sequence of events, recounted by a narrator to a narratee."[5] In Seymour

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[4] Michael D. Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002), 16.

[5] Chris Baldick, *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 219. Baldick's definition of narrative stipulates further that: "Narratives are to be distinguished from descriptions of qualities, states, or situations, and also from dramatic enactments of events (although a dramatic work may also include narrative speeches)."

Chatman's seminal *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*,[6] which musicologist David Nicholls observes is one of the very few works of narratology to acknowledge the existence of musical narrative,[7] the author defines narratives as necessarily comprising both "story" and "discourse." In Aristotelian fashion, Chatman posits that stories are in turn composed of both events (actions, happenings) and existents (characters, settings), while discourses are "the means through which the story is transmitted."[8] Certainly, there are many songs that corroborate these notions of narrative in that they introduce characters who perform actions in time, but there are yet many others that constitute more impressionistic descriptions of persons, places, or things. Scholars of popular music have been somewhat more flexible in their approaches to understanding how songs are narrative or story-like. Imani Perry writes of rap as having different "formats," including narrative, exhortation/proclamation, description, battle, and allegory.[9] Even though only one of these—"narrative"—necessarily includes characters that perform actions and undergo a traversal of time, she notes that all are invoked to tell tales. Keith Negus' notion of popular songs as narrative rests on the senses in which they are "intercontextual" and "participate in the wider cultural dialogues through which

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[6] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).

[7] David Nicholls, "Narrative Theory as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Popular Music Texts," *Music & Letters* 88, no. 2 (2007): 297.

[8] Chatman, *Story*, 9.

[9] See Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 77-101.

historical understanding is narrated."[10] My discussion of Taiwan rap songs as stories builds on the frameworks outlined by both Perry and Negus: some pieces lend themselves to analysis as narrative in the traditional sense, while discerning the storytelling qualities of others requires consideration of their position in various "social and semiotic chains of narrative meaning."[11]

This final part of the dissertation is divided into two sections: I begin with a general discussion of the means by which Taiwan rap stories are expressed, or what Chatman might refer to as their "discourse." I include in this a discussion of both musical and linguistic features, taking account of the ways in which Taiwan's various tonal languages infuse lyrics with a deeply communicative musicality. As Tricia Rose has written: "Simply to recite or read the lyrics to a rap song is not to understand them; they are also inflected with the syncopated rhythms and sampled sounds of the music."[12] Indeed, meaning resides not just in the content of stories but also in the sonic and performative structures that govern their telling; music does not play a merely incidental or accompanying role in Taiwan rap storytelling, but is critical to producing its affective dimensions. I will then proceed to a series of close readings of selected songs, some in excerpt and some in their totality. Thinking back to Part One's discussion of rap as an

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[10] Keith Negus, "Narrative, Interpretation, and the Popular Song," *The Musical Quarterly* 95, no. 2-3 (Summer-Fall 2012): 368.

[11] Ibid., 373.

[12] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 88. Writing several years later, hip-hop scholar Robin D.G. Kelley echoed Rose's sentiments when he wrote that "Hip-hop must be understood as a sonic force more than anything else." Robin D.G. Kelley, *Yo Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 38.

extension of local narrative practice, which delineated three main categories into which *liām-kua* narratives tend to fall, I devise an organizational scheme for Taiwan rap that is focused on narrative theme and content. I begin with stories about history, which are concerned primarily with giving accounts of Taiwan's past, from the period of Qing rule to the twentieth century. Next, I explore stories about gender and sexuality, which underscore rap's identity as a durable outlet for expressions of male subjectivity. I conclude with stories about the vicissitudes of daily life, which chronicle performers' quotidian struggles and joys.

THE MEANS BY WHICH RAP STORIES ARE TOLD: MUSICAL SOUND AND LANGUAGE

Although discourse, in Chatman's sense, might encompass everything from an artist's attire and onstage antics to album liner notes and cover art, I focus in this section on musical sound and language as building blocks of meaning in Taiwan rap stories. It was these features that interviewees referred to most consistently in our discussions and that figured most prominently in their evaluations of performances. Their comments often addressed the questions: Has an artist selected the best and most politically expedient language for a particular lyric? Are samples deployed creatively and judiciously? Are beats and original instrumentals composed and used effectively? Time and again, those with whom I spoke also commented on the musicality of language: Does Mandarin, Hoklo, Hakka, or one of the Aboriginal languages make for better rap? Which supplies the greatest musical interest and produces a superior sense of flow?

With regards to the latter point, while I delineate separate categories of musical and linguistic sound, it is important to note their inextricability from one another in

practice. Owing to the tonal nature of the Sinitic languages, it can be difficult to tell where music ends and linguistic signification begins: lyrics possess inherent contours defined by the four tones of Mandarin, the six or seven tones of Hakka, and the seven tones of Hoklo.[13] Indeed, as I will explore, many in the community refer to the strong tonality and unique sonic signatures of Taiwan's various languages as compelling features of rap produced on the island. Musicologists studying a wide variety of historical and contemporary world traditions have long been interested in the affinities between music and language, from George List's early inquiries into "The Boundaries of Speech and Song"[14] to Kofi Agawu's more recent forays into "Music as Language."[15] Agawu, citing John Neubauer, points out that the ancient Greeks in fact "designated music and language by a single term, *musiké,*" indicating a sense of confluence between the two.[16] This confluence is all the more marked in Taiwan rap, because tone in the Sinitic languages is phonemic—that is, changes in tonal articulation give rise to changes

[13] The Austronesian languages spoken by Taiwan's Aboriginal peoples are non-tonal. As I have established, however, there are relatively few rappers of Aboriginal heritage.

[14] George List, "The Boundaries of Speech and Song," *Ethnomusicology* 7, no. 1 (January 1963): 1-16.

[15] V. Kofi Agawu, "Music as Language," in *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). There is of course an extensive body of scholarship exploring the diverse intersections of music and language. See, for example, Charlotte J. Frisbie, "Vocables in Navajo Ceremonial Music," *Ethnomusicology* 24, no. 3 (Sep., 1980): 347-392; Anthony Seeger, "Oratory is Spoken, Myth is Told, and Song is Sung, But They Are All Music to My Ears," in *Native South American Discourse*, ed. Joel Sherzer and Greg Urban (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1986), 59-82; and Steven Feld, "Wept Thoughts: The Voicing of Kaluli Memories," *Oral Tradition* 5, no. 2-3 (1990): 241-266.

[16] John Neubauer, *The Emancipation of Music from Language: Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986) 22-23. Cited in Agawu, *Discourse*, 15.

in semantic meaning.[17] On one level, the contours of tonal lyrics contribute to the musical interest of a rap performance. Beyond their aesthetic qualities, however, these contours are themselves constitutive of meaning.

Musical Sound

I asked each rapper I interviewed the question: "When did you decide to become a musician?" My intention had been to glean when artists made the choice to embark upon their careers in rap and perhaps to gain a sense of whether they had received any formal or informal education in music composition or performance. But the query instead often prompted interviewees to issue gentle objections to my use of the term "musician" (*yinyuejia* 音樂家), as most insisted that they considered themselves "MCs" or "vocalists" (*geshou* 歌手) rather than musicians, per se. As Chang Jui-chuan put it: "I don't even consider myself a musician, this is something I feel [is] inferior about myself. I can't really read notes. Well, I know what it represents, but if I need to I have to read it very slowly. For me, I know it's very old-fashioned, but…I think a professional musician should be able to read notes very fast."[18] MC Hotdog expressed similar sentiments:

[17] The Sinitic tongues have proven particularly fertile ground for research on music performance in tonal languages, as cited in Part One, p.107n115-117. Bell Yung has published extensively on this topic, for example "Role of Speech Tones in the Creative Process of Cantonese Opera," *CHINOPERL Papers*, no. 5 (1975): 157-167; "Creative Process in Cantonese Opera I: The Role of Linguistic Tones," *Ethnomusicology* 27, no. 1 (Jan., 1983): 29-47; "Linguistic Tones," in *Cantonese Opera: Performance as Creative Process* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 82-91; "The Relationship of Text and Tune in Chinese Opera," in *Music, Language, Speech and Brain*, ed. J. Sundberg, L. Nord, and R. Carlson (London: The Macmillan Press, 1991): 408-418. Beyond the Sinitic languages, Kofi Agawu's work on music and phonemic tone in Ewe has been particularly influential. See "Tone and Tune: The Evidence for Northern Ewe Music," *Africa* 58 (1988): 127-146.

[18] Chang Jui-chuan 張睿銓, personal interview, 26 November 2009.

"Actually, I never made a decision to become a musician. I just really liked hip-hop, liked rap, it was very natural. And up to now I never considered myself a musician."[19] Although some received instruction in piano, violin, or other instruments as children, most confessed that they had been forced to set aside their artistic aspirations as the academic competition for admission to secondary school and college intensified and they were compelled to spend all their spare time studying for the island's notoriously difficult entrance exams.

These protestations notwithstanding, my intention in this section is to explore the musical dimensions of Taiwan rap. I define "musical" and "musician" perhaps more flexibly than the artists themselves do: music encompasses the vocal performance of the rapper as well as accompaniment—live or pre-recorded, sampled or newly composed—to the rapping voice. From my perspective as a musicologist, it need not matter whether an artist has facility reading music or playing an instrument: to engage consciously and consistently in the performance of rap music is to *be* a rap musician. In this sense, I follow numerous other scholars who have written about rap, which has often been stigmatized as fundamentally non-musical or, as Adam Krims writes, "debated in terms unrelated to its musical aspects."[20] Rob Walser comments that classical musicians and critics, as well as a number of popular and jazz artists, have resisted characterizing rap as music. He notes that these figures have in common "fundamental assumptions about what music is: it is based on melody and harmony; it depends on a laborious process of learning to sing or to use a 'musical instrument'; it is produced when human beings cause

[19] MC Hotdog 熱狗, personal interview, 12 August 2010.

[20] Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 39.

objects to vibrate." He adds that assessments of rap as not musical based on these assumptions "should be seen in the light of a centuries-old tradition of cultural authorities and rival musicians missing the point of black music, popular music, rhythmic music, or timbrally complex music, and concluding that such musics are 'primitive.'"[21] My objective here is to introduce and briefly summarize the musical parameters by which Taiwan rap is created, evaluated, and enjoyed. These parameters include aspects not of melody or harmony, per se, but of vocal performance, including flow, vocal quality or timbre, and enunciation; and aspects of accompaniment to the voice, including the use of samples, original instrumentals, and environmental sonorities. Given that they tend to regard the act of composition as more intuitively creative and productive than rational or methodical, rappers do not typically describe their music with recourse to such terms. Nevertheless, based on conversations with community members about their work and the works of others, I hypothesize that they would recognize these categories as the basic molecular components from which rap music is constructed.

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[21] Robert Walser, "Rhythm, Rhyme, and Rhetoric in the Music of Public Enemy," *Ethnomusicology* 39, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1995): 195. Music theorist Kyle Adams has also written about the reluctance of scholars to treat rap as a musical activity, arguing the following specific reasons: "First, many still hesitate to accept rap music as a valid art form, and even those who readily accept it are not necessarily interested in analyzing it. Second, Western music theory has traditionally been pitch-centered; and, since the pitch content of rap is usually secondary to the rhythmic content, a pitch-centered approach might not yield very useful results. Even more significantly, the accompaniment in rap music typically consists of a single 2- to 4-bar segment that repeats continuously throughout the song. This repetitive accompaniment makes all but the most rudimentary text-painting quite difficult; text-painting in rap has traditionally been limited to the choice of music with the same affect as the text (such as the minor-mode accompaniment to Slick Rick's dark "Children's Story"), or the use of sampled sounds (such as gunshots) alongside descriptions of those sounds in the lyrics." See Kyle Adams, "Aspects of the Music/Text Relationship in Rap," *Music Theory Online* 14, no. 2 (May, 2008), paragraph 2.

Vocal Performance

Among the few existing studies that perform analysis of the musical qualities of rap (e.g. Walser 1995, Krims 2000, Miyakawa 2005),[22] Alyssa S. Woods' 2009 dissertation "Rap Vocality and the Construction of Identity" is unique in addressing specifically the central role of the voice in meaning-making.[23] A music theorist, Woods argues that "MCs' vocal production and performances are not only the primary carriers of the lyrics, but they also convey musical meanings through vocal nuance, declamation, and rhythmic delivery."[24] Woods draws her evidence from the corpus of mainstream American rap, but I would argue that the voice plays a similarly significant role in Taiwan rap. Indeed, the voice constitutes a primary site of engagement with rap music for aspiring performers on the island. As discussed in Part Two, those who wish to study rap can enroll in MCing classes with members of Kung Fu Entertainment, participate in ciphers organized by H.O.O.D. or the NTU Hip-Hop Culture Research Society, and get involved in battles like the ones that took place as part of Lyricist Park. The focus of all of these activities is learning how to write or improvise rhymes and cultivating skills for their delivery through the voice. Musical accompaniment to the voice is somewhat secondary, and, to this point, many amateur MCs never learn much beyond the basics of sampling, opting instead to search out pre-packaged beats online.[25] Among professionals,

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[22] Felicia Miyakawa, *Five Percenter Rap: God Hop's Music, Message, and Black Muslim Mission* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

[23] Alyssa S. Woods, "Rap Vocality and the Construction of Identity" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2009), 3.

[24] Ibid. 3-4.

[25] Many of those I interviewed lamented the lack of music compositional know-how and music production skills among members of the Taiwan rap community. Chang Jui-chuan

the stars of the rap scene are the MCs, and their vocal performances typically attract the lion's share of critical attention and praise from audiences.

Of central importance in evaluating vocal performance, in Taiwan as elsewhere, is an artist's flow. Woods concurs with Krims' description of flow as "the MC's rhythmic delivery"[26] and Paul Edwards, author of the primer *How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-hop MC*, characterizes it as "simply the rhythms and rhymes [a hip-hop song] contains."[27] Defining flow might be a straightforward proposition, but it is notoriously difficult to render in analytical terms. Krims gestures at the significance and complexity of flow in noting that "[rhythmic] style marks several dimensions of rap music at once for artists and fans—history, geography, and genre all at once, not to mention the constant personal and commercial quest for uniqueness."[28] In an effort to create a common vocabulary for discussing flow, he names and outlines the basic features of three distinct, though often overlapping, varieties: the sung rhythmic style, the percussion-effusive style, and the speech-effusive style. To fans of American hip-hop, the sung rhythmic style is recognizable for its "old-school" feel, reminiscent of the rap that first emerged from the South Bronx during the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is characterized by "rhythmic

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attributed the frequent use of pre-packaged beats and samples to the relative newness of rap on the island: "Some of the hip-hop artists here in Taiwan are still using instrumentals of those artists probably from the United States and even Japan. I think the current state of Taiwanese hip-hop is still learning, still trying to learn from what other people have done. And I think it's ok because all learning starts from copying or whatever, but I'm sure that's going to have more originality in the future." Chang, personal interview.

[26] Krims, *Rap Music*, 15.

[27] Paul Edwards, *How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-hop MC* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), 63.

[28] Krims, *Rap Music*, 49.

repetition, on-beat accents (especially strong-beat ones), regular, on-beat pauses" and couplet groupings with end rhymes that fall consistently on the fourth beat.[29] Krims observes that the percussion-effusive and speech-effusive styles arose somewhat later as "new-school" artists of the 1990s and after developed a preference for faster and more complex rhythmic styles.[30] The term "effusive" refers to a tendency among artists using these styles to "spill over the rhythmic boundaries of the meter, the couplet, and, for that matter, of duple and quadruple groupings in general."[31] This spillage can be achieved through subdivision of the beat, staggering of syntax or rhymes, off-beat accenting, or by other means of creating polyrhythms. With percussion-effusive flows, the listener is given the impression that the MC is using his or her mouth as a percussion instrument, effecting "off-beat attacks with a sharply-attacked and crisp delivery that accentuates the countermetric gestures."[32] Speech-effusive flows, on the other hand, have the feel of spoken language, with fluid articulation and "little sense often projected of any underlying metric pulse."[33] Lest it should seem as though speech-effusive flows are less stylistically marked than either sung rhythmic or percussion-effusive styles, Krims notes that MCs with speech-effusive flows are often distinguished by their ability to create

[29] Ibid., 50.

[30] Ibid., 49.

[31] Ibid., 50.

[32] Ibid., 50-51.

[33] Ibid., 51.

irregular and unpredictable polyrhythmic patterns and construct rich and complex rhyme schemes in their compositions.[34]

The earliest Taiwan rap, as performed by Blacklist Workshop, the LA Boyz, and The Party between the late 1980s and early 1990s, adhered for the most part to the conventions of the sung rhythmic style. The influence of old-school American artists like Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, whose hit "The Message" was released in the United States in 1982, is palpable in songs like Blacklist's "Imperial Taipei," "Taxi," and "Democracy Bumpkin," released in 1989. The Hoklo-language "Taxi," which tells the story of a hard-working cabbie in Taipei City, is a particularly strong example of the sung rhythmic style.[35] The first verse is rendered here with characters, followed by Romanization, and finally by English translation; pairs of rhyming syllables are highlighted in like colors:

1. 透早出門走東撞西認真做生意
2. 為著生活大街小巷我拼到強袂死
3. 毋管長途短途我攏四界載
4. 人客叫我往東我不敢往西

1. *thàu tsá tshut mn̂g tsáu-tang tsáu sai jīn-tsin tsò sing-lí*
2. *uīti□h sing-uo̍h tuā ke sè hāng guá piànn kah kiōng beh sí*
3. *m-kuán tn̂g toô té toô guá lóng sì-kè tsài*
4. *lâng-kheh kiò guá óng tang guá m-kánn óng sai*

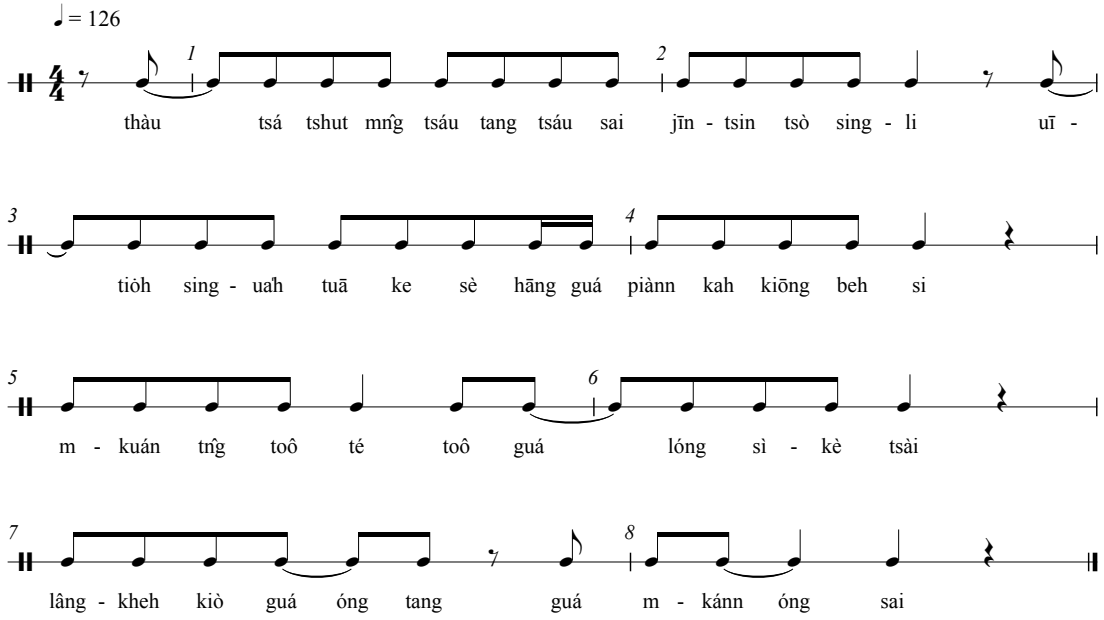
1. *I head out first thing in the morning and run all over the place doing business*
2. *to make a living in the avenues and alleys I work myself to death*
3. *whether it's a short or far ride, I can carry the load*
4. *if customers tell me to go east, I'm not going to go west*

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Blacklist Workshop 黑名單工作室, "Jichengche" 計程車 [Taxi], *Zhuakuang ge* 抓狂歌 [Songs of madness], Rock Records, 1989, compact disc.

True to the sung rhythmic style, the verse consists of two sets of end-rhyming couplets, the first of which pairs *lí* (the second syllable of *sing-lí*, "business") with *sí* ("death") in lines (1) and (2), and the second of which pairs *tsài* ("load") with *sai* ("west") in lines (3) and (4). As demonstrated in the below transcription, the rhyming syllables occur at the same location in each two-measure line, coinciding with a consistent strong-beat accent at the third beat of the second measure, and followed in each case by a regular on-beat pause:



Musical Example 2: Transcription of vocal line from Blacklist Workshop's "Taxi" (計程車), approximately 0:53 - 1:07

As shown, additional accents occur predominantly on the strong beats, at the beginning of each two-measure line comprising the second couplet, for example. Notable exceptions are the weak-beat accents that occur in the pick-ups that open each two-bar line of the first couplet, as well as the weak-beat accents buried within the second

couplet. However, the repetition of predictably placed end-rhymes produces an overall impression of a rigid rhythmic structure that is characteristic of the sung style.

In recent years, among artists in Taiwan as in the United States, sung rhythmic flows have become more of a rarity, and effusive styles have proliferated.[36] A survey of recent recordings by Taiwan rappers suggests further that speech-effusive flows are more prevalent than percussion-effusive flows on the island. This seems intuitive given that most performers I interviewed cited as major influences American artists who demonstrate speech-effusive styles, such Big Pun, Rakim, Notorious B.I.G., and members of the Wu Tang Clan. When I asked which Taiwan MCs they most admired, many named Soft Lipa, whose rhythms and rhymes they described as poetic, effortless, and even delicate.[37] Although he moves between different styles of flow in different songs, Soft Lipa has a particular facility with the speech-effusive style, as demonstrated in this short excerpt from the first verse of the 2009 song "Homesickness" (*Xiangchou* 鄉愁). The song describes the feeling of urban alienation, telling the story of a person who migrates to the city in pursuit of job opportunities and feels increasingly disconnected from home. Mandarin-language lyrics are rendered here first in characters, followed by

[36] Groups that perform what Krims would classify as "party rap" are an exception to this trend. MJ116 and the Down South Boyz, for example, often employ sung rhythmic flows.

[37] A number of community members described Soft Lipa's work in terms of its poeticism and effortlessness, but Manchuker was the only one who used the term "delicate": "I like his stuff very much, he would be my favorite rap artist in Taiwan. Because he's so delicate, his stuff is delicate…And he rarely uses any English, so that is very special. For Chinese rappers to be this type of scale, like using all Chinese, and being delicate…His stuff is artsy, poetic." Manchuker 滿人, personal interview, 21 September 2010.

Romanization, and finally translation; groups of rhyming syllables are highlighted in like colors:

1. 而對於每種背景離鄉的鄉愁都大致相同
2. 我將從你的回憶裡面找出其中一種
3. 會讓你想哭的人不只講故事
4. 也曾經照顧著你像是小護士

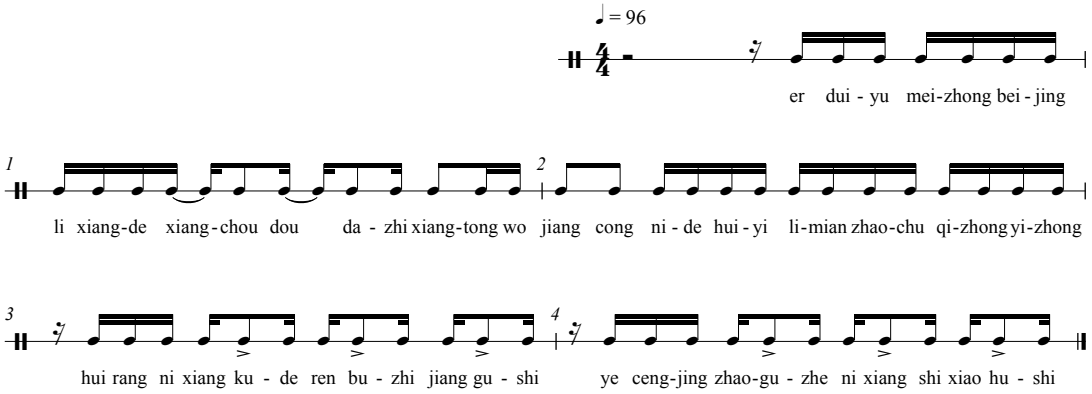
1. *er duiyu meizhong beijing li xiangde xiangchou dou dazhi xiangtong*
2. *wo jiang cong nide huiyi limian zhaochu qizhong yizhong*
3. *hui rang ni xiang kude ren buzhi jiang gushi*
4. *ye cengjing zhaoguzhe ni xiang shi xiao hushi*

1. and for folks from all walks of life, their homesickness is much the same
2. from your memories, I am going to find one among them
3. those you cry for did more than tell you stories
4. they once cared for you like little nurses

Compared to the excerpt from Blacklist Workshop's "Taxi," Soft Lipa's "Homesickness" contains a more complex network of rhymes. Most immediately audible are, of course, the end-rhyming syllables *tong* ("alike") and *zhong* ("kind") of lines (1) and (2), and the end-rhyming *gushi* ("story") and *hushi* ("nurse") of lines (3) and (4). But there is also a great deal of internal rhyme, for example the syllables *chou* (the second syllable of *xiangchou*, "homesickness") and *dou* ("all") in line (1), and the sequence of *ku* ("cry"), *bu* ("not"), *gu* (the first syllable of *gushi*, "story"), *gu* (the second syllable of *zhaogu*, "to look after"), and *hu* (the first syllable of *hushi*, "nurse") in lines (3) and (4). Soft Lipa's internal rhymes are fast and furious, reflecting Krims's observation that speech-effusive styles often deploy "large numbers of syllables rhyming together, so that once a rhyme is established, quite a few rhyming syllables will be produced before the next series of rhymes begins."[38]

[38] Krims, *Rap Music*, 51.

While the intricacy of Soft Lipa's rhymes is apparent from the written lyrics alone, the rhythmic patterns of his vocal performance add an additional layer of complexity. The four lines of text above map roughly onto four four-beat measures, but as demonstrated in the transcription below, Soft Lipa launches into the verse two beats before the beginning of what I have designated the first measure:



Musical Example 3: Transcription of vocal line from Soft Lipa's "Homesickness" (鄉愁), approx. 0:29 - 0:40

This opening heightens the impression, present in the lyrics, that Soft Lipa is commencing his verse in the middle of an ongoing discussion ("And for folks from all walks of life…"). Moreover, it reflects the characteristic spillage of the speech-effusive styles; that is, the syntactic unit is dissociated from the metric unit. A variant on this dissociation is apparent at the end of the first measure and beginning of the second, where Soft Lipa deploys an internal rhyme (*xiangtong* and *jiang cong*) that crosses not just the boundary between one measure and the next, but also between one line of text and the next. This rhyme is highlighted by the repeated rhythmic figure of two strong-beat eighth notes, notable because of the contrast with the preceding weak-beat eighth notes and subsequent rapid-fire sixteenth notes. This marriage of a rhyme with a distinctive

rhythmic unit occurs again in the third and fourth measures; there, the repeating rhythmic unit is defined by a strong-beat sixteenth note followed by a weak-beat eighth note and weak-beat sixteenth note. The internal rhymes *ku*, *bu*, *gu*, and *hu* fall on the accented weak-beat eighth notes, whereas *zhi* and *shi* fall similarly on weak-beat sixteenth notes. Together, these features of Soft Lipa's performance reflect the complex rhythmic and rhyming patterns characteristic of the speech-effusive styles as defined by Krims.

Among the artists who sometimes adopt percussion-effusive flows are MC Hotdog and Dog G, although they typically interweave these with speech-effusive sections. More often than not, interviewees described these figures as noteworthy for the controversial content of their work, rather than their delivery skills, per se. MC Hotdog himself stated that he keeps three things in mind, none of which is flow, when he listens to or performs rap: "The first is the feeling of the beats, the second is what the lyrics are talking about, and then the last is the feeling of the whole thing together."[39] Nevertheless, these two MCs have demonstrated virtuosic capabilities with respect to all three flow styles that Krims outlines. Dog G's 2001 track "Forty-four Fours" (*Sishisige Si* 四十四個四), a boast on the theme of kung fu wherein Dog G likens himself to a martial arts master, accounts for one of the few examples of percussion-effusive flow that I have encountered within the corpus of Taiwan rap.[40] The rhythms and rhymes provide the challenge of a tongue twister, showcasing the MC's vocal prowess as he mocks his adversaries in rap. Mandarin-language lyrics to the song are rendered here first in

[39] MC Hotdog, personal interview.

[40] Dog G 大支, "Sishisige si" 四十四個四 [Forty-four fours], *Shecan lianhua* 舌粲蓮花 [Lotus from the tongue], Magic Stone Music, 2002, compact disc.

characters, followed by Romanization, and finally translation; groups of rhyming syllables are highlighted in yellow, while occurrences of alliteration, which I will also discuss, are highlighted in green:

1. 降龍十八式　十八銅人少林寺　獨孤九式　一生一世
2. 切～你的招式等級只不過是小姑娘再世　有眼不識泰山
3. 孫悟空在釋迦牟尼前放肆　放肆放肆　五指山會被誰識破　倒是要見識見識
4. 你們每個人都是近視　是不是　是不是　近視幾度

1. *xianglong shiba shi shibatong ren shaolin si dugu jiu shi yisheng yishi*
2. *qie ~ nide zhaoshi dengji zhi buguo shi xiao guniang zai shi youyan bushi Taishan*
3. *Sun Wukong zai Shijiamoni qian fangsi fangsi fangsi Wuzhishan hui bei shei shipo daoshi yao jianshi jianshi*
4. *nimen meige ren dou shi jinshi shi bushi shi bushi jinshi jidu*

1. the eighteen dragon moves, the eighteen copper men of Shaolin, the nine moves of Dugu, in one life
2. cut ~ you move like a little reincarnated girl, you have eyes but can't see I'm Tarzan
3. the Monkey King disrespected disrespected disrespected the Buddha. Who will see through Wuzhi Mountain? I'd like to see that
4. you all are near-sighted, right? right? how thick are your glasses?

The approach to rhyme here diverges from both the previous examples. Whereas Blacklist Workshop's "Taxi" is sparse with rhyme and Soft Lipa's "Homesickness" replete with rhyme, Dog G's "Forty-four Fours" pursues a different agenda entirely: it repeats the syllable *shi*, mapped to a number of different characters with different tonal inflections and meanings (for example, the second-tone *shi* 十 that means "ten" and the fourth-tone *shi* 式 that means "moves"), nineteen separate times, rhyming it occasionally with the syllables *si* ("temple"), *zhi* ("only"), *si* (the second syllable of "presumptuous"), and *zhi* (the second syllable of the phrase "Wuzhi Mountain"). The object of interest in this sequence is less the like-sounding final stressed vowels than the matching and alliterative initial consonants: *sh*, *zh*, and *s*. There is a bit of an inside joke here: Hoklo-accented Mandarin speakers like Dog G often experience difficulty pronouncing the

sounds *sh* and *s* differently—both typically emerge as *s*. The incessant repetition of these sounds, which are strongly articulated, gives the impression that the MC is using his mouth, per Krims's description, as a percussion instrument.

The rhythmic placement of these sounds against the meter aligns this performance most closely with Krims's notion of the percussion-effusive style. Additional occurrences of the *sh* sound as in *shao* (the first character of "Shaolin"), *sheng* ("life"), *shan* ("mountain"), and *shei* ("who") contribute to the overall alliterative effect and also constitute vocal attacks, as illustrated in the transcription below:



Musical Example 4: Transcription of main vocal line from Dog G's "Forty-four Fours" (四十四個四), approximately 0:15 - 0:35

Although these attacks occur on strong beats in the first measure, they shift thereafter unpredictably between strong and weak beats. Weak-beat attacks occur notably at the end of measures 3, 4, 7, and 8, and at the junction of measures 5 and 6. These attacks

accentuate the countermetric gestures as is characteristic of percussion-effusive flows, particularly at measures 5 and 6 where "*fangsi fangsi*" spills over the boundary of the bar line. And, in keeping with a quality shared by both the speech- and percussion-effusive styles, Dog G's syntactic units are often dissociated from the meter, crossing bar lines from measures 3 to 4 and 6 to 7. Overall, the tempo is fast and the delivery rapid-fire, far removed from the sound of regular speech.

The preceding discussion has highlighted the rhythmic and rhyming variation that informs assessments of flow as either speech-effusive or percussion-effusive. Less obvious from the transcriptions I have provided, however, is the role that vocal timbre or quality plays in creating an impression of flow. Cheryl Keyes writes that in rap, "timbre entails the synchronicity of vocal quality and articulation."[41] There are as many different voice qualities in Taiwan rap as there are participants in the Taiwan rap scene, but in the particular examples of effusive styles that I have provided, it is notable that Dog G and Soft Lipa's vocal timbres stand in stark contrast to one another. Soft Lipa's sound is smooth, mellow, resonant, and clear as he relaxes into each phrase and maintains a steady, seemingly effortless sense of forward motion. He ventures markedly into neither a chest nor a head voice, but rather stays within the range of normal speech, striking a conversational tone. Dog G, on the other hand, is raspy, gruff, and guttural—he plumbs the low depths of his vocal range to achieve a distinctly aggressive sound. His performance is highly stylized, punctuated by growls and strongly articulated consonant sounds, all of which contributes to what I have described as its percussion-effusiveness.

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[41] Keyes, *Rap Music*, 131.

I cannot account precisely for why speech-effusive flows are so much more prevalent in Taiwan today than either the sung rhythmic or percussion-effusive styles, although I suggest that there are two possible explanations: 1) speech-effusive flows currently dominate American rap, which remains strongly influential to performers on the island; and 2) artists and audiences alike profess an admiration for performers who can effectively exploit the inherent musicality of Taiwan's various tonal languages.

With the exception of the Austronesian languages spoken by the island's Aboriginal peoples, Taiwan's major languages are tonal. Mandarin has four tones, including a high level tone (typically labeled "first tone"), a rising tone ("second tone"), a falling rising tone ("third tone"), and a falling tone ("fourth tone"); there is also a neutral tone, which has no discernible contour. Five dialects of Hakka are in use on the island, but the majority of speakers are conversant in either Siyen {四縣} or Hoiluk {海陸}, which have six and seven tones, respectively.[42] Acoustic studies of Hakka are relatively rare and tone classification systems vary, but generally speaking Hakka is said to have a mid level tone, a low level tone, a mid falling tone, a high level tone, a mid falling staccato tone, and a high rising staccato tone.[43] Although Hoklo, which varies slightly from the north to the south of the island, once had eight tones, it retains seven in its modern form. These include a high level tone ("first tone"), a high falling tone ("second tone"; redundant with the "sixth tone," which has been lost), a low falling tone ("third

[42] Hakka Affairs Council, "Amazing Hakka: Language and Traditions," last modified December 29, 2010, http://www.hakka.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=110321&ctNode=2828&mp=2210&ps=.

[43] Mantaro J. Hashimoto, *The Hakka Dialect: A Linguistic Study of its Phonology, Syntax and Lexicon* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 104.

tone"), a staccato falling tone ("fourth tone"), a rising tone ("fifth tone"), a mid level tone ("seventh tone"), and a high staccato tone ("eighth tone"; in some parts of Taiwan, this is a mid staccato tone). Each language abides by different rules of tone sandhi, with Hoklo and Hakka having the most complex patterns of allophonic change.[44]

Artists and audiences with whom I spoke frequently commented on the different sonic qualities of rap in these languages, with most expressing the opinion that the greater number of tones in Hoklo lend the language a discernible sense of musicality. DJ Chicano opined that Hoklo has a distinctly "musical flavor" (*quwei* 曲味).[45] MC Fish Lin of Kou Chou Ching—a strong advocate for Hoklo language and culture—corroborated this view:

> When you use Hoklo, even if you just speak it, it has melody. In fact, you'll find that many Hoklo songs, you might say that they're sung, but the way Hoklo sounds when sung is not that different from the way it sounds when spoken. Hoklo songs like the ones that Chen Ming-chang and Lim Giong perform, the way they sound singing is not that different from the way they sound speaking. Hoklo inherently sounds smooth.[46]

Lin suggests that Hoklo is so strongly tonal that one need not sing in the language for an utterance to sound musical. With this as the case, Hoklo seems especially appropriate to the chanted or intoned speech quality of rap vocalization in the speech-effusive style. Many others echoed Lin's assessment of the language as having a fundamentally

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[44] "Tone sandhi" refers to the process by which the tones of individual syllables change in response to the tones of the syllables that come before or after them. For example, in Mandarin, two third-tone syllables in succession will actually be pronounced as a second-tone syllable followed by a third-tone syllable.

[45] DJ Chicano Chien 簡光廷, personal interview, 14 June 2011.

[46] Fish Lin, personal interview, 12 May 2010.

"melodic" and "smooth" sound. To this point, Manchuker made recourse to shape metaphors in his efforts to describe the sounds of Hoklo, Mandarin, and English:

> I think it's beautiful…[Hoklo] has more tones than Mandarin, so that makes it sound full and good. But I think Mandarin can do it, too, it just takes time to master it. I think for English, English is a round circle shape of language…and for [Mandarin], it's like a square…so you maybe have to make it so that it becomes a circle…And [Hoklo] is somewhat like English, a more round shape type of language.[47]

While Manchuker's description of English as having "a round circle shape" is somewhat cryptic, I interpret his comment as a response to the fact that tone, while an important feature of prosody, is not phonemic in English. Rather, shifts in intonation can be used to convey grammatical, lexical, and paralinguistic information. A performer of English-language rap is relatively free to vary the pitch and tonal contour of individual words as well as whole phrases for expressive effect without concern that meaning will be lost on the listener. An MC working in the Sinitic languages, however, must negotiate additional constraints. He can, like an English-speaker, manipulate pitch to vary the prosody of an expression, but he must at the same time articulate the tones of individual words if his lyrics—especially complex ones—are to be understood.[48] Manchuker hears in Mandarin a "square" quality, attributable to its four tones. An MC using Hoklo must also of course articulate the tones of individual words, but three additional tones provide additional sources of sonic variation.

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[47] Manchuker, personal interview.

[48] There are copious studies about comprehensibility and tonal language lyrics. My personal experience suggests that simple lyrics allow people to get meaning from context, but more complex lyrics are another matter entirely.

It is a widely held view among members of the community that rap performed in Mandarin, because of the language's more limited tonal palette, runs the risk of sounding like *shulaibao* (數來寶, lit. "counting treasures"), a form of Northern Chinese recited narrative poetry with roots in the Ming dynasty. *Shulaibao* is typically performed by a soloist or duo with no instrumental accompaniment apart from minimal percussion—usually one small and one large pair of clappers (*ban* 板)—and features markedly straight (*zhi* 直) as opposed to swung (*yaobai* 搖擺) rhythms.[49] The form is characterized by alternating six- and seven-character lines that conclude with the same tone and rhyme on the final syllable. *Shulaibao* was originally the province of itinerant performers who would stop in front of shops to sing the praises of a vendor's goods in exchange for a small quantity of money. Today, however, the subjects of *shulaibao* narratives run the gamut from the dramatic to the comedic, and encompass everything from historical stories to recitations of classic tales. In their bid to be understood by audiences, artists deliver lyrics in a deliberate fashion and enunciate the four tones of Mandarin in an exaggerated manner, which lends the style a very angular—or, in Manchuker's words, "square"—sound. To listeners in Taiwan, *shulaibao* sounds a great deal like rap, but rap that is performed with a stiff, halting flow. As music critic Ma Shih-fang put it:

> You don't want to make [rap] sound like, you know, this old kind of folk music called *shulaibao*...People in old-time Beijing, they used [imitating the sound of clappers] clap, clap, clap! And they chanted over it and it [can be] very funny—you don't want to have to become *shulaibao*...So if

[49] Mandopop singer Wang Leehom demonstrates the differences between *shulaibao* and rap in a promotional video for McDonald's, for which he has been a company spokesman. See "Lee-Hom Teaches You How to Rap," video clip, uploaded 23 March 2009, accessed March 8, 2013, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdrvlwxRjy8.

> you're using Mandarin, in Mandarin we have only four tones, it's very difficult. You have to avoid it becoming *shulaibao*…you have to find a different flow, a different groove.[50]

While musicians performing in Hoklo have long courted comparisons to *liām-kua*, with its local roots-music associations, Mandarin-language rappers cringe at the mere mention of *shulaibao*, which is marked as distinctly not-local and strikes them as not old-school but old-fashioned (from "old-time Beijing"). There is considerable room for creativity in the performance of *shulaibao*, but its formal constraints—the standard use of clappers, straight rhythms, alternating six- and seven-character lines, and prevalence of end rhyme—seem at odds with rap's ethos of experimentation and embrace of irregularity.

I hypothesize that speech-effusive flows currently predominate among Taiwan rappers in part because artists, especially those who perform in Mandarin, must work against associations with *shulaibao*. If *shulaibao* sounds formal, mannered, and non-conversational, then rap is most convincing when it sounds the opposite: casual, effortless, conversational. Returning to the challenges of performing in tonal languages, MCs must walk a fine line between clear articulation—that is, remaining faithful to the tone of a given word such that it can be understood by listeners—and strong enunciation in the manner of traditional *shulaibao* performers. It perhaps goes without saying at this point that there are no hard and fast rules in Taiwan rap, and there are certainly performers who stretch the possibilities of their inherent vocal qualities and the languages in which they choose to perform. Indeed, there is a wide range within what I have characterized as speech-effusive flows. As I will show later in Part Three, not all speech-effusive

[50] Ma Shih-fang 馬世芳, personal interview, 18 January 2010.

performances resemble Soft Lipa's mellow delivery; the style can also be turned to more militant, aggressive, and declamatory purposes.

Musical Accompaniment

This dissertation is a study of the creative processes that underlie the telling of Taiwan rap stories, including the generation of lyrics, the act of vocal performance, and the practice of "making beats" (*zuo* beats 做beats). Hip-hop scholar Joe Schloss has described beats in the hip-hop context as "musical collages composed of brief segments of recorded sounds."[51] When the musicians I interviewed discussed making beats, they described a variety of approaches to this task, including creating percussion tracks and melodies using online programs, keyboards, MPCs (Music Production Centers), digital sequencers, and other electronic and electrified instruments. They also referred to techniques of discovering and manipulating compelling samples (*quyang* 曲樣) of musical and non-musical sounds for the purposes of creating emotional impact and enriching their stories through intertextual reference. Clear distinctions are rarely made between newly composed and found sounds in the liner notes to Taiwan rap recordings or on the websites to which amateur performers post their creations. At times, I suspected that snippets of music featured in songs were samples of others' work, but when I inquired as to the origin of these sounds, performers could not supply me with any useful information about their provenance.[52] Although a cloud of uncertainty seems to surround

[51] Joseph G. Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 2.

[52] For example, I asked RPG to identify the sample that loops throughout the song "My Tainan City," discussed in Part Two, but he couldn't recall where the music had come from. RPG, Facebook message to author, 1 November 2012.

copyright issues in the Taiwan rap community, I doubt that these denials stemmed from fear of legal repercussions. Indeed, I have to this date heard no tales of woe regarding allegations of copyright infringement litigation brought against a Taiwan rap performer. On the contrary, my impression is that many artists simply did not know or had not kept track of where their samples came from, or that they and their producers had manipulated samples so drastically by chopping them up or adjusting their speed and pitch that they no longer felt that it was ethically or legally necessary to credit the original composers or performers.[53] In some cases, rap tracks feature not samples but interpolations—that is, re-performances of others' creations on live instruments—although these forms of musical quotation often go similarly uncredited.[54]

In the following pages, I confine my discussion of musical accompaniment to sounds that I can clearly and definitively identify as either newly composed or sampled

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[53] The words of Wayne Marshall would seem to ring true here: "Some producers and acts, especially independent and largely local artists, operate well enough under the radar to evade scrutiny or harassment and continue to sample with impunity. And some—in particular, acts with a sizeable national, if not international, following but who lack the resources of a 'major label'—find themselves in a tight spot: to sample or not, to be real or not, to be sued or not? Among those who choose to continue sampling, some manipulate their samples to disguise their sources (but not their sampledness), while others make brazen musical allusions. Both approaches, in letting the seams show, advance an audibly militant position with regard to copyright law." Wayne Marshall, "Giving up Hip-Hop's Firstborn: A Quest for the Real after the Death of Sampling," *Callaloo* 29, no. 3 (2006): 869.

[54] Hip-hop scholar Mickey Hess defines interpolation as "working from original sheet music but playing the sound in a new performance." He notes that early hip-hop performers like Afrika Bambaataa and Sugarhill Gang relied on this technique, "hiring live musicians to play basslines, drum breaks, and keyboard segments from sheet music originally composed and performed by other bands." Doing so allowed them to pay royalties to the musician who composed the work and owned the copyright to the sheet music rather than the record company that produced the sound recording. See Mickey Hess, *Is Hip-Hop Dead?: The Past, Present, and Future of America's Most Wanted Music* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 106.

from a preexisting source. This strategy is a response to the ambiguities inherent in the process of creating Taiwan rap, as I have described, but it also honors the wishes of DJs and producers who choose not to disclose the sources of their samples for ethical or moral reasons.[55] Although this necessarily limits the scope of the conversation to artists who label their sources in liner notes, whose samples are clearly identifiable by ear, or who provided citation information in interview settings, it enables a preliminary sketch of the sonic and aesthetic effects arising from what I broadly define as musical accompaniment. Following this general overview of practices, I will explore the more specific uses to which musical accompaniment is put in the close readings that comprise the second half of Part Three.

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The sampling practices of Taiwan rappers are extremely diverse. Artists mine recordings of everything from local traditional and global popular musics to film and television soundtracks in their attempts to find new and compelling materials with which to experiment. Groups such as Kou Chou Ching consider sampling a critical compositional building block and a key aspect of their signature sound: they dedicate significant amounts of time and energy to staking out night markets, temples, and music shops for cassettes and CDs of ritual music, opera, and folk songs,[56] and their liner notes provide detailed information regarding the origins of samples as well as their reasons for

[55] Schloss provides an extensive discussion about the ethics of sampling. See "Sampling Ethics," in *Making Beats*, 101-133.

[56] David Chen, "Taiwan's Ambassadors of Rap," *Taipei Times*, August 18, 2008, accessed March 1, 2013, http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2008/08/18/2003420730. Fan Chiang and Fish Lin also discussed this process in my interviews with them.

employing them on specific tracks. Kou Chou Ching follows earlier artists like Jutoupi in emphasizing the particularities of Taiwan's soundscape, playing with creatively repurposed excerpts from existing recordings to comment on matters of local social and political importance. The 2008 album *Kou!! It's Coming Out!!!* opens with a track titled simply "Intro," which announces with unmistakable clarity the group's dedication to local sample-based rap. DJ J-Chen weaves together short excerpts of pieces from disparate musical traditions, including Taiwanese opera, Hengchun folk music, and Hakka *bayin*, among others. In between, there are snippets from local political call-in radio shows, advertisements, and news broadcasts. Knitting these sonic moments together is static, the suggestion of a radio dial moving back and forth along the spectrum of frequencies. "Intro" is a collage of pre-recorded materials, and as the album unfolds, its logic is gradually revealed: each piece will later emerge as a sample, to be tinkered with and manipulated as Kou Chou Ching desires.

Other artists, particularly those who understand rap primarily in terms of its identity as *xiha*, prefer to sample from musics more proximal to American hip-hop, including 1960s and 70s R&B, soul, funk, and even classic hip-hop. The Tripoets' 2008 songs "Beginning of Rhyme" (*Yayunde kaishi* 押韻的開始), "Come With Me" (*Gen wo zou* 跟我走), and "Tripoets Game" (*Sanpi youxi* 參劈遊戲) prominently feature and play with harmonized vocal fills, horn and rhythm breaks, and piano riffs captured from the era of *Soul Train*.[57] One track, "Used to Love Her,"[58] a tribute to American MC

[57] All three songs appear on the album *Yayunde kaishi* 押韻的開始 [The beginning of rhymes], Rock Records, 2008, compact disc.

[58] Tripoets 參劈, "Used to Love Her," *Yayunde kaishi* 押韻的開始 [The beginning of rhymes], Rock Records, 2008, compact disc.

Common's 1994 "I Used to Love H.E.R.,"[59] includes a slightly manipulated sample of Common's voice as an opening gesture, twice repeating the line "Yes yes y'all" that commences the original recording. At the chorus, the group quotes more of Common's material, performing an interpolation of the complete line: "Yes yes y'all, and you don't stop, to the beat y'all, and you don't stop."

Interpolation seems to be the preferred technique for quoting from more immediately recognizable works, particularly those originally performed by globally famous artists. MC Hotdog's 2006 collaboration with rock musician Chang Chen-yue, "I Love Taiwan Girls" (*Wo ai taimei* 我愛台妹),[60] features a live guitar and vocal line that quotes and slightly transforms the chorus of the Spinners' 1972 classic "I'll Be Around,"[61] while his 2006 "Encore" (*Anke* 安可)[62] quotes and slightly transforms the recurring harmonic progression I – v, played on synthesized strings, that underpins British band The Verve's 1997 hit "Bitter Sweet Symphony."[63] Likewise, Da Ximen's 2009 "I Love Rock 'n' Roll" (*Wo ai yaogun* 我愛搖滾) interpolates the opening chords and chorus of "I Love Rock 'n' Roll," made famous in 1981 by Joan Jett and the

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[59] Common, "I Used to Love H.E.R.," *Resurrection*, Relativity Records, 1994, compact disc.

[60] MC Hotdog 熱狗 ft. Chang Chen-yue 張震岳, "Wo ai Taimei" 我愛台妹 [I love Taiwan girls], *Wake Up*, Rock Records, 2006, compact disc.

[61] The Spinners, "I'll Be Around," *Spinners*, Atlantic Records, 1972, compact disc.

[62] MC Hotdog 熱狗, "Anke" 安可 [Encore], *Wake Up*, Rock Records, 2006, compact disc.

[63] The Verve, "Bitter Sweet Symphony," *Urban Hymns*, Hut Records, 1997, compact disc. The provenance of the samples in both "I Love Taiwan Girls" and "Encore" is obvious enough that both are documented on the popular website WhoSampled.com.

Blackhearts,[64] with guest artist Tony of the band Monkey Pilot performing the distinctive I – I – IV – V progression that opens the original on his electric guitar. Lead MC Mr. Brown then joins Tony in singing the chorus melody with modified lyrics: "I love rock 'n' roll, but hip-hop is also good!" (I love rock 'n' roll, *danshi* hip-hop *qishi ye bucuo!* I love rock 'n' roll 但是hip-hop其實也不錯！).[65]

Although many artists consider quotation a cornerstone of their art and are painstaking in their choice of music to sample or interpolate, others take a more pragmatic, even casual, approach to appropriating existing materials. Kung Fu Entertainment's website sometimes features songs responding to current events that lift the beats wholesale from other rap recordings.[66] These kinds of tracks are not intended for placement on albums but are designed to be consumed quickly, before today's newspapers line tomorrow's waste baskets and the public has forgotten the current event in question. RPG's track "I Am Insane" (*Wo shi shenjingbing* 我是神經病),[67] which I will discuss at greater length later, was written in 2010 in response to comments made by Taiwan's health minister regarding the island's low birth and marriage rates, and samples

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[64] Joan Jett & The Blackhearts, cover performance of "I Love Rock 'n' Roll," by Alan Merrill and Jake Hooker, Boardwalk Records, 1981, LP.

[65] Da Ximen 大囍門, "Wo ai yaogun" 我愛搖滾 [I love rock 'n' roll], *X*, Avex Taiwan, 2009, compact disc.

[66] Schloss notes that the ethical codes of American hip-hop discourage sampling from other rap recordings, but the practice does not seem to carry the same stigma in Taiwan, at least where sampling from non-Taiwanese artists is concerned. See "One Cannot Sample from Other Hip-Hop Records," in *Making Beats*, 114-119.

[67] RPG, "Wo shi shenjingbing" 我是神經病 [I am insane], 2010, music and lyrics archived online, accessed March 8, 2013, http://tw.streetvoice.com/music/Rapguy/song/109804/.

extensively from Jay-Z's 2009 track "On to the Next One."[68] When I chatted online with RPG regarding the use of Jay-Z's work, he explained that the choice was a purely pragmatic one: "I gotta be in time, so I just grab whatever beat n wrote it…when [the song's] related to News, we won't spend too much time on perfecting our own works on the music side, [but] on the lyric side. Cuz the consumer's behavior in Taiwan…Short-sighted, easy to forget…so our songs need to come out fast…but when it comes to making an album, we will definitely put a lot of effort on it."[69] In this case, RPG was in search of an existing musical skeleton to quickly and effortlessly flesh out with his original rhymes. Time was of the essence, and creativity vis-à-vis beat-making was of secondary importance to simply cobbling the track together and releasing it before listeners' attentions were diverted to another news story.

Beyond finding inspiration in prerecorded music, Taiwan's rappers make significant use of non-musical material in their work, including the environmental sonorities that Cheryl Keyes terms "city sounds."[70] These encompass not only the sirens and car horns that Keyes notes as populating the American rap soundscape, but also an array of other sonic phenomena familiar to anyone who has spent time on the island: the revving of motor scooter engines, the tweet of traffic whistles, the chatter of political call-in radio shows that spill out from open taxi windows. Artists also tap sounds native to more intimate settings, such as the bedrooms and bathrooms that proliferate behind the facades of urban Taiwan's numerous ramshackle apartment buildings: Soft Lipa's

[68] Jay-Z, "On to the Next One," *The Blueprint 3*, Roc Nation/Atlantic Records, 2009, compact disc.

[69] RPG, Facebook correspondence, 1 July 2012.

[70] Keyes, *Rap Music*, 147.

"Winter Morning Sounds," an instrumental track, for example, gains texture from a ringing alarm clock and incessantly running shower.[71] The sounds of nature also surface occasionally: both Kou Chou Ching's paean to environmental awareness, "Grey Coastlines" (*Huise haian* 灰色海岸),[72] and the T-Ho Brothers' plaintive song of homesickness, "Momma" (*Muqin* 母親),[73] include samples of the sounds of the waves crashing against the shores of Orchid Island.[74]

Although this discussion of musical accompaniment has thus far focused on samples and interpolations, a number of Taiwan rap artists feature newly composed music in their works, performed at times by live instruments. The use of live instruments constitutes a somewhat controversial gesture from the perspective of American hip-hop purists, who have long considered sampling "hip-hop's central and essential musical practice."[75] Indeed, Schloss dedicates an entire chapter of his ethnography *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (2004) to the question of authenticity in rap that deploys live instruments in place of samples, and Wayne Marshall's "Giving Up Hip-Hop's Firstborn: A Quest for the Real after the Death of Sampling" (2006) explores how members of hip-hop group the Roots have reconfigured definitions of hip-hop

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[71] Soft Lipa 蛋堡, "Winter Morning Sounds," *Winter Sweet*, Kao!, 2009, compact disc.

[72] Kou Chou Ching 拷秋勤 ft. Alilis, "Huise haian" 灰色海岸 [Grey coastlines], *Wuming yingxiong* 無名英雄 [Unsung heroes], independent release, 2009, compact disc.

[73] Ti-Ho Brothers 鐵虎兄弟, "Muqin" 母親 [Momma], *Tiehu Xiongdi* 鐵虎兄弟 [Ti-Ho Brothers], Taiwan Colors Music, 2003, compact disc.

[74] Environmental sonorities—especially the sound of the ocean—are also frequently present in popular music by Aboriginal performers, for example Pau-Dull (*Chen Jiannian* 陳建年) and Samingad (*Ji Xiaojun* 記曉君).

[75] Marshall, "Giving up," 868.

realness to accommodate their use of original material. For all the anxieties they have seemed to stimulate among American promulgators of hip-hop orthodoxy, however, the presence of live instruments and newly composed music seems to be a non-issue for members of the Taiwan rap community. To create his largely synthesizer-based recordings, Chang Jui-chuan has collaborated extensively with producers and live musicians including Lim Giong, Adia (阿弟仔), and Peabody Conservatory-trained pianist Sandra Li. Soft Lipa teamed up with Japanese jazz ensemble Jabberloop for the 2010 album *Moonlight* (*Yueguang* 月光).[76] As Soft Lipa raps repeatedly on the track "We Got Jazz," *Moonlight* is replete with "sax, trumpet, keyboard, bass, drums," but contains no identifiable samples.[77] Among the personnel comprising quintet Kou Chou Ching are two rotating instrumentalists, Yobo and Achino, who perform on *suona*, melodica, accordion, and recorder, among other instruments. They are often responsible for producing the melodic hooks of Kou Chou Ching's signature songs, including the *suona* riff that opens the song "Black Heart" (*Hei xingan* 黑心肝)[78] and the recorder line that establishes the main melody of "Grey Coastlines." Although Da Ximen is the only artist in the scene that performs what might be called rap-rock, several others, including MC Hotdog, have collaborated with rock drummers and electric guitarists.

[76] Soft Lipa 蛋堡 and Jabberloop, *Yueguang* 月光 [Moonlight], Kao!, 2010, compact disc.

[77] "We Got Jazz," *Yueguang*.

[78] Kou Chou Ching 拷秋勤, "Hei xingan" 黑心肝 [Black heart], *Kao! Chulaile* 拷！出來了 [Kou!! It's coming out!!!], independent release, 2008, compact disc.



Figure 15: Chang Jui-chuan performs live with a violinist, 4 June 2011. Photo by author.

Language

In the preface to *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*, H. Samy Alim, Awad Ibrahim, and Alastair Pennycook write that language is "the omnipresent medium through which Hip Hop cultural practices, performances, and productions are both expressed and constituted…Given the dominance of *rappin* in Hip Hop cultural practice, language is perhaps one of the most useful means by which to read Hip Hop Culture."[79] In Taiwan, language can also provide an aperture onto musicians' ethnic identities and, given the politicized nature of

[79] H. Samy Alim, Awad Ibrahim, and Alastair Pennycook, eds., *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language* (New York: Routledge, 2009), vii.

language use on the island, their ideological orientations. That said, language and ethnic identity do not always come into alignment for artists or audiences: those who identify as Hakka, for example, often speak Hoklo or Mandarin better than they speak Hakka; and Mandarin "is no longer necessarily associated with being a *waishengren* among the younger generation."[80] Many artists indicated to me that their language choices are not made exclusively on the basis of identity or ideology; aesthetics (which language an artist feels *sounds* best) and pragmatism (which language an artist is most comfortable with and feels will communicate most directly to the audience) also influence their selection. Rappers make a deliberate decision to tell their stories in Mandarin, Hoklo, Hakka, or Aboriginal languages, among others, and linguistic medium plays a significant role in shaping their music's message.

It is difficult to overstate the depths of emotion that surround conversations about language on the island, within and beyond the rap community. Comments that President Lee Teng-hui made in an oft-quoted 1994 interview with the *Central Daily News* resonate with what I have heard from many over the years about their experiences of language prejudice, before and after the end of martial law:

> I am more than seventy years old. Having lived under different regimes, from Japanese colonialism to Taiwan's recovery, I have greatly experienced the miseries of the Taiwanese people. In the period of Japanese colonialism, a Taiwanese would be punished by being forced to kneel out in the sun for speaking *Tai-yü* [Tai-gi]. The situation was the same when Taiwan was recovered [by the KMT]: my son, Hsien-wen, and my daughter-in-law, Yueh-yun, often wore a dunce board around their necks in the school as punishment for speaking *Tai-yü*. I am very aware of the situation because I often go to the countryside to talk to

[80] Mandy Scott and Hak-Khiam Tiun, "Mandarin-Only to Mandarin-Plus: Taiwan," *Language Policy* 6, no. 1 (March, 2007): 68.

> people. Their lives are influenced by history. I think the most miserable people are Taiwanese, who have always tried in vain to get their heads above the water.[81]

In 1987, Taiwan's Provincial Bureau of Education formally outlawed the practice of using physical punishment and issuing fines to penalize students for speaking Hoklo, Hakka, or Aboriginal languages on school grounds,[82] and these languages emerged incrementally in the political and popular discourses thereafter.[83] But old prejudices die hard: today, particularly in the urban centers of the north, Mandarin continues to index the cosmopolitan, the refined, and the educated, while non-Mandarin languages index the provincial, the low-class, and the uneducated.[84] This sense of low prestige is compounded by the lack of standard, well-known orthographies for Taiwan's non-Mandarin languages and the resulting sense of them as therefore less "evolved" than Mandarin.[85]

Blacklist Workshop and Jutoupi rapped their resistance to monolingualism during the immediate post-martial law period by performing in a variety of non-Mandarin languages. With the exception of just a few Mandarin phrases in the song "Democracy

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[81] Quoted in Todd L. Sandel, "Linguistic Capital in Taiwan: The KMT's Mandarin Language Policy and Its Perceived Impact on Language Practices of Bilingual Mandarin and Tai-gi Speakers," *Language in Society* 32, no. 4 (Sept., 2003): 523.

[82] Ibid., 530. For an exhaustive discussion of language politics in Taiwan, also see Hong Weiren 洪惟仁, *Taiwan yuyan weiji* 台灣語言危機 [Taiwan's language crisis] (Taipei: Qianwei, 1992).

[83] See Jennifer M. Wei, "Language Choice and Ideology in Multicultural Taiwan," *Language and Linguistics* 7, no. 1 (2006): 87-107.

[84] Wi-vun Taiffalo Chiung 蔣為文, "Language Attitudes Toward Written Taiwanese," in *Gí-giân, Gīn-tông kap Kh-sit-bîn* 語言，認同與去殖民 [Language, identity, and decolonization] (Tainan: National Cheng Kung University, 2005), 315-354.

[85] Ibid. Also see Scott and Tiun, "Mandarin-Only," 66-67.

Bumpkin"—such as the symbolically potent martial law-era slogan "Recapture the Mainland!" (*fangong dalu* 反攻大陸)—*Songs of Madness* is almost entirely in Hoklo. As previously noted, Jutoupi employs no fewer than seven languages on his *Funny Rap* albums, including Hoklo, Hakka, Mandarin, Bunun, English, Japanese, and French. Despite growing acceptance of non-Mandarin languages since the end of martial law and the efforts of artists to develop new inroads for non-Mandarin languages into the realm of popular culture, competency in these languages among the general population has continued to decline: most of the Aboriginal languages are now considered endangered by linguists,[86] and a 2003 survey indicated that only 36.3% of people 13 to 29 years-old who identified as Hakka could speak the Hakka language.[87] The picture seems less grim for the majority Hoklo population, but many artists and audience members I interviewed, particularly in the north of the island, lamented their poor Hoklo proficiency relative to Mandarin. Indeed, those who write in non-Mandarin languages often referred to their use of rap as a language-learning tool and their reliance on dictionaries to help them through the creative process. Speaking about the Hengchun folk singer Chen Da, rapper Chang Jui-chuan expressed feelings of inferiority about his facility with Hoklo compared to previous generations who had greater exposure to the language: "Chen Da, his lyrics, even though he was more like a bum in his time, most of the words [he uses], I can't use those words anymore…His words are very elegant and graceful. And we are, like, very colloquial. So I wouldn't compare myself to him or, you know—they're just way much

[86] See Elizabeth Zeitoun, Ching-hua Yu, and Cui-xia Weng, "The Formosan Language Archive: Development of a Multimedia Tool to Salvage the Languages and Traditions of the Indigenous Tribes of Taiwan," *Oceanic Linguistics* 42, no. 1 (June 2003): 218-232.

[87] Scott and Tiun, "Mandarin-Only," 59.

better. Just listen to their [Hoklo]…they're just way better."[88]

Language As a Site of Resistance in the Music of Chang Jui-chuan

Perhaps more than any other artist currently active in the Taiwan rap scene, Chang uses his music to reflect on language as a locus of power in Taiwan. Born in Changhua (彰化) in 1977 to a Mandarin teacher mother and a physics teacher father, he developed an interest in American popular culture in middle school and was inspired to undertake serious study of the English language. He followed this interest through to graduate school, ultimately receiving a master's degree in Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse from DePaul University and completing coursework towards the PhD in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) at National Chengchi University. In an unpublished personal essay entitled "My Language," he writes about the ways in which he was socialized into monolingualism as a young child:

> People who lived in [my] neighborhood were teachers and their families. Most of them were civilians who followed the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) when it fled China and retreated to Taiwan after losing a civil war to the Chinese Communists in 1949. The rest were native Hoklo Taiwanese, like my family. When I was little, as I recall, I had difficulty understanding the speech of some of the older people in the neighborhood because they spoke Mandarin Chinese with a different accent. I also realized that when I was at home with my family, I spoke Hoklo Taiwanese and Mandarin Chinese, but when I was out with my playmates chasing grasshoppers and asking grownups for candies, I had better speak Mandarin Chinese to get what I wanted.[89]

Chang learned early on that he would be rewarded for speaking Mandarin in public, even

[88] Chang Jui-chuan 張睿銓, personal interview, 3 December 2009.

[89] Chang Jui-chuan, "My Language" (personal essay, 2010), 2.

if Hoklo was permissible in the private realm. This lesson was reinforced at school, where students faced consequences for lapsing into non-Mandarin languages or calling one another by their non-Mandarin names. He recalls a story one of his classmates told him of punishment she received for breaking the rules:

> Most young students like her had no money, so when they were caught speaking Taiwanese dialects, they had to be wandering on the streets after school looking for cardboard waste and empty metal cans, which could be exchanged for a few cents, and it took many days to reach the amount of the fine. When she was fined for speaking Taiwanese at school, she did not want her parents to know about it because she knew they were saving every penny to take care of the kids…She was full of tears when she was sharing the story with the class, which has been engraved in my heart ever since.[90]

This brief narrative echoes Lee Teng-hui's earlier statements about the public shaming that resulted from linguistic transgressions, and the memories of such punishments that continue to figure in the popular and political discourses about Taiwanese identity. Like many musicians currently active in the Taiwan rap scene, Chang was a child when martial law was lifted, but this personal testimony suggests that early experiences like this one were deeply influential to his development as an artist.

Chang is generally quiet and self-effacing, neatly groomed with glasses and a small goatee, but his voice grew louder and his tone more strident when we discussed the politics of language in a 2009 interview. Chang explained to me that he raps exclusively in Hoklo and English and would never consider performing in Mandarin, which he characterizes as the "oppressor's language":

> [Hoklo] is historically and politically appropriate to express messages or feelings of people like us who have been in

[90] Chang, "My Language," 5.

> Taiwan for a long time and suffering with the KMT and all that…When you rap in Mandarin Chinese, you rap in an oppressor's language. That totally goes against the origin of hip-hop, I would say. People argue about that, but for me personally…it would be torture for me to rap in Mandarin Chinese.[91]

By performing in a formerly suppressed language that continues to carry a social stigma, Chang invokes Hoklo as what hip-hop scholar Tony Mitchell has termed a "resistance vernacular," which "[reterritorializes] not only major Anglophone rules of intelligibility but also those of other 'standard' languages."[92] In other words, to rap in Hoklo is to challenge the primacy of Mandarin, to refute its claims of superiority over non-Mandarin languages and cultures on the island. In this regard, Chang has much in common not only with Blacklist Workshop and Jutoupi, but also with underground rappers in a variety of other global contexts, such as 1990s Basque artists Negu Gorriak and Maori artists Moana and the Moa Hunters who have rejected the use of Castilian Spanish and English, respectively, in Spain and New Zealand.[93]

Chang also raps in English, even though he views globalization as a potentially malevolent force and sees the West, America in particular, as oppressive in its exercise of cultural and economic imperialism on the island. This presents a logical contradiction to his moratorium on Mandarin, but the rapper does not seem troubled by the incongruity. On the contrary, his use of English allows him to employ an alternative tactics of

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[91] Chang, personal interview.

[92] Tony Mitchell, *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*, ed. Tony Mitchell (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 3-4.

[93] See Jacqueline L. Urla, "'We Are All Malcolm X!': Negu Gorriak, Hip Hop, and the Basque Political Imaginary," in *Global Noise*, 171-193; and Tony Mitchell, "Kia Kaha! (Be Strong!): Maori and Pacific Islander Hip-Hop in Aoteatoa-New Zealand," in *Global Noise*, 280-306.

resistance, as he says, to "use the Master's tool to dismantle the Master's house" and "[claim] ownership of this new musical (and linguistic) hybrid by asserting, 'Yes, this is yours, but this is also mine.'"[94] Where he hopes that his Hoklo-language compositions reach local listeners with a personal investment in Taiwan's cultural and political life, Chang uses English in order to reach a broader global audience:

> When I rap in English it's more toward the English audience and the world. Of course I don't assume that everyone in the world speaks English, but at least to people outside of Taiwan, I want to approach them as well. I don't want to just speak to my own people all the time. I want people outside of Taiwan to understand Taiwan better. I have a message for them.[95]

Aspects of that message are made apparent in the chorus to his 2009 English-language song "My Language," for which the essay discussed above was named:[96]

> *I speak your language, don't mean I'm your slave,*
> *I speak your language 'cause I'm about to invade,*
> *Your music, your culture, your beliefs, and your fate,*
> *With kung fu, Confucius, Tao, and my name*

With this, listeners are urged to consider how language can be used to empower and disempower individuals, to make and unmake civilizations. Language is a source of power, indeed, but Chang leverages rap in his efforts to reconfigure relationships in which he—a non-native English speaker who considers Hoklo, rather than Mandarin, his mother tongue—has historically been subordinate.

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[94] Chang, "My Language," 7. Chang is invoking Juanita R. Comfort, whom he cites in the essay. See Juanita R. Comfort, "African-American Women's Rhetorics and the Culture of Eurocentric Scholarly Discourse," in *Contrastive Rhetoric Revisited and Redefined*, ed. Clayann Giliam Panetta (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001), 91-104.

[95] Chang, personal interview.

[96] Chang Jui-chuan 張睿銓, "My Language," *Chuangshiji* 創世紀 [Genesis], Adia's, 2006, compact disc.

Notably, the terms "master" and "slave" in the essay and song lyrics refract the rapper's narratives of Taiwanese subjugation through the lens of African American experience, suggesting a comparison between Taiwanese and African American suffering. It is important to note, however, that none of the rappers I have met in Taiwan claim a history or identity that is isomorphic with African America's, even as they take impetus and inspiration from hip-hop culture. Instead, their invocation of terms clearly identified with African American struggle—a common gesture among performers of global hip-hop—constitutes what anthropologist Jacqueline L. Urla has characterized as a "strategic deployment of signifiers that affords youth a window into their own situation and what it shares with that of racialized minorities."[97] The "master" and "slave" in Chang's texts therefore resound thematically as symbols of resistance rather than of blackness. To this point, the artist's 2006 album *Genesis* (*Chuangshiji* 創世紀) includes the track "Be An Intelligent Person," which comprises an unmodified, 27-second sample from an undated speech by Malcolm X, in which the famed civil rights activist implores his audience to cease dependence on "the white man" and take responsibility for their own destinies: "No, you teach yourself, and stand up for yourself, and respect yourself, and know yourself, and defend yourself, and *be* yourself, and you'll be recognized as an intelligent person."[98] In the liner notes to the track, Chang writes in English and Chinese script: "For better understanding, the 'white' here does not necessarily mean 'white-complexioned.' I would rather say it symbolizes 'the oppressor.' 在這裡的「白」不完全代表膚色；對

[97] Urla, "Malcolm X," 181.

[98] Chang Jui-chuan, "Be An Intelligent Person," *Chuangshiji* 創世紀 [Genesis], Adia's, 2006, compact disc.

我們來說，應解讀為「壓迫者」。”[99] The lessons Chang seeks to teach by analogy are clear: as African Americans have resisted the oppression of whites, so Taiwan's peoples must resist the oppression of the West, the KMT, and all those who would presume the superiority of non-Native Taiwanese, non-Aboriginal languages and cultures.

The Politics of Multilingual Rap

The members of Kou Chou Ching, with whom Chang Jui-chuan has sometimes collaborated, are also dedicated to promoting linguistic diversity in their work. MCs Fan Chiang and Fish Lin are outspoken in their support of Taiwan sovereignty, and most of their songs comment in some way on either the politics of culture or the culture of politics on the island. The presence of Mandarin, Hoklo, Hakka, and Aboriginal languages in their work underscores a clear commitment to political engagement and to promulgating a sense of Taiwanese discursive space as multicultural and multiethnic. Both MCs also noted in interviews that using multiple languages allows them to capitalize on the different aesthetic possibilities of each, as well as to direct specific messages to specific speech communities—a variation, perhaps, on what Henry Louis Gates has termed "signifying."[100] As Fan Chiang put it:

> [Mandarin, Hoklo, and Hakka] all play different roles in my life, so I look for ways to have all three appear in different places in my lyrics. For example, if I speak Hakkanese it means I have some things that I want to express that I don't want you to understand quite so quickly. Instead, it should make you want to translate our lyrics or

[99] Chang Jui-chuan, Liner Notes, *Chuangshiji* 創世紀 [Genesis], Adia's, 2006, compact disc.

[100] Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988).

> look up some information in order to understand. When I use Taiwanese [Hoklo], it's a little like I don't want absolutely everyone to understand, but I want you to know a little, because not everyone really speaks Taiwanese. Some people do. I use Mandarin for things that I want to be understood immediately, like quickly after listening to the song, for those things I use Mandarin. So I use all three of these languages, because when you put these three things in hip-hop, each represents, or expresses, or rather the rhymes and flow that they generate, have different feels.[101]

Unlike Chang, Kou Chou Ching does not exclude Mandarin from their linguistic palette; as the language that the group assumes most of their listeners understand best, it retains critical communicative currency. Additionally, the group notes language mixture as a source of aesthetic interest in their music, an idea that I will return to later.

Beyond Chang Jui-chuan and Kou Chou Ching, there are a number of other rappers who perform in non-Mandarin languages, particularly those with connections to Kung Fu Entertainment. Dog G and many of his southern colleagues profess greater comfort with Hoklo than their northern counterparts. Dadi, who was born and raised in Tainan, explained to me that Dog G inspired him and his friends to perform in Hoklo, a language that they are both more fluent in and emotionally connected to than Mandarin.[102] For these artists, the choice to use the language is not simply a political gesture, but also a reflection of its primacy in their lives. The same logic prevails in the opposite direction as well, with Taipei-based artists like MC Hotdog, the Tripoets, and Mr. Brown, who are predominantly Mandarin speakers and therefore prefer that language for rap. As MC Hotdog put it: "I sometimes add some Hoklo to my Mandarin, but

[101] Fan Chiang 范姜, personal interview, 7 April 2010.

[102] Dadi 大帝, personal interview, 26 September 2010.

ultimately my Hoklo isn't very…I'll just say that I was a kid who grew up in Taipei, and I occasionally go to the south, and I can speak Hoklo, but it's not too smooth. And I'm not going to use it if it's not smooth."[103] Mr. Brown expressed similar sentiments: "I can't really write much in Hoklo. Taipei isn't a great place for Hoklo, even though I understand it."[104]

The notion that one must rap in a language that feels natural to oneself also extends to artists in the scene who identify as Taiwanese Americans or who have lived abroad in the United States. The LA Boyz, native English speakers with some knowledge of Hoklo, were one such group; today, MCs Witness and Manchuker are identified with the use of English in their lyrics, which they mix—sometimes at the rate of every other word—with Mandarin. Witness, who was born in Boston but grew up in Houston, studied Speech Communications at the University of Texas at Austin and worked both as a DJ and for Dell Computers before moving to Taipei to pursue a career as an MC. He speaks Mandarin with a gentle Texas twang and writes most of his lyrics in English before translating them into Chinese. He explained to me that this is a laborious process that sometimes yields less than ideal results:

> Sometimes I can't find a word that rhymes in Chinese, so I throw in the English…I mean, I am what I am, which is American, you know? With a heritage that's Taiwanese. So my Chinese just isn't that good. And so basically I'm just being me, where sometimes I feel like the English is a little bit better in this particular line, so I keep it, you know?[105]

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[103] MC Hotdog 熱狗, personal interview, 12 August 2010.

[104] Mr. Brown 布朗, personal interview, 27 August 2010.

[105] Witness 黃崇旭, personal interview, 18 August 2010.

One example of a typical Witness lyric that mixes English and Mandarin is found in the 2005 track "Our Story" (*Womende Gushi* 我們的故事):[106]

baby I know 我們所經過的很 crazy, make you wanna leave me
so 我不能 blame 妳 不會怪妳 謝謝妳 還是跟著我在一起
甚麼都沒的時候 妳不管沒名利 yeah, so 我對妳感激不盡
妳一直相信 過去生活 不是真的我 一直等待 我回到真正的我
you make me wanna say, "Baby, let me love you now."

baby I know what we've been through is crazy, make you wanna leave me
so I can't blame you, can't blame you, thank you for still being with me
when I had nothing you didn't care that I was a nobody yeah, so I'm grateful to you
you can always trust that the life I lived in the past wasn't the real me, always wait, I'll return to the real me
you make me wanna say, "Baby, let me love you now."

Witness' songs rarely address the challenges of negotiating multiple national-ethnic identities, but the linguistic patchwork of his lyrics clearly reflects a sense of Du Bois' double bind, of feeling in-between Taiwanese and American worlds, and of struggling to communicate effectively with both.[107] Although his Mandarin-English hybrids speak to the rapper's desire to keep it real, his inclination toward mixing languages has sometimes been met with opprobrium by other artists and audiences: "There have been some people who've criticized me before, saying that I use too much English, and that did kind of move me into trying to not use as much, but this is me."[108] Resistance to English-

[106] Witness 黃崇旭, "Womende gushi" 我們的故事 [Our story], *Huang Chongxu* 黃崇旭 [Witness], Rock Records, 2005, compact disc.

[107] Witness' new track "Everything's Gonna Be Alright," from an upcoming album, is an exception. In it, he raps specifically about his experiences as a Taiwanese-American growing up in Texas. See Witness 黃崇旭, "Everything's Gonna Be Alright," music and lyrics archived online, accessed March 10, 2013, http://tw.streetvoice.com/music/djwitness/song/139185/.

[108] Witness, personal interview.

Mandarin mixture is interesting considering the warm welcome that the LA Boyz received in the early 1990s: more than two decades after the emergence of hip-hop culture on the island, it seems that rap no longer requires the validation or authorization of English-speaking Taiwanese Americans, who are at this point no more proximal to "authentic" hip-hop culture than local community members like MC Hotdog or Dog G.

Unlike Witness, Manchuker was born in Taipei and lived there until he was a teenager, but moved overseas at the age of 16 to stay with relatives in affluent Cupertino, California when he failed to thrive in the Taiwanese school system. After several years on the west coast, the rapper moved across the country to Jersey City, then to Queens where, working mostly among other East and Southeast Asian immigrants as a delivery boy for a Chinese restaurant, he discovered a love for rap. Within a few years he began making beats, writing rhymes, and performing as one of the founding members of R&B/hip-hop collective Asian Power. Hoping to develop a career in Asia, he returned to Taipei permanently in 2005 at the age of 28. It is perhaps owing to his experiences among diverse Sinitic language-speaking communities in the U.S. that, more than any other rap artist I have encountered in Taiwan, he strongly identifies as ethnically *Chinese* and seeks to represent on behalf not just of Taiwan's peoples, but of diasporic Chinese throughout the world:

> For Chinese people, it was very hard for us for the past two hundred years. Like people looked at us like we were inferior, and all the war, like opium and you know. So Manchuker is really about that—it's about representing and telling the history, it's really about letting our own people know what's going on. We are not going to hold this as a grudge against other races, but it's just a fact, it's history how others treated us back then when we were poor, when

we were insufficient.[109]

His reference to the humiliations of the opium wars and the struggles of the "past two hundred years" suggests clear identification with China's painful decline in the nineteenth century, during which numerous rebellions, natural disasters, and conflicts with western imperial powers led inexorably to the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912. To this point, the name "Manchuker" is not an indication of Manchurian ancestry but a tribute to the Qing. Balancing his aspirations to communicate with and represent on behalf of his "own people," Manchuker explicitly deploys his multilingual music as a tool for bridging a divide among the Mandarin-speaking east and the English-speaking west:

> I think it's because of my background, but I always want to relate back to New York, to Cali, to Taiwan, to China…I want to relate to everybody. I want to speak a common language, and the [reason] I use a lot of mixed English and Chinese is because I also want to get English listeners into Chinese hip-hop, because it's more interesting […] and especially nowadays a lot of people want to learn Chinese. And my thinking is that my music is good for people to listen to to learn Chinese […] just like how we started to learn English. We always find lyrics and look it up, see what they really mean. I think Chinese hip-hop has the same function.[110]

Manchuker intends to attract a broad constituency, including westerners with an interest in learning Mandarin in light of China's rise to global prominence in the twenty-first century. He sees rap as more than a mere source of entertainment, but as a potential medium for communication with these audiences, a means of speaking back—this time on equal terms—to a West that once again seeks to benefit from China's prosperity.

To be sure, Manchuker's tactics are not unlike Kou Chou Ching's or Chang Jui-

[109] Manchuker, personal interview.

[110] Ibid.

chuan's, as all three deliberately use multiple languages and demand that listeners take personal initiative to fill in the gaps in what they can comprehend aurally. But the ideological valences of their gestures could not be more different: whereas Chang Jui-chuan deploys English to challenge the discursive and material legacies of western cultural imperialism in Taiwan, and Kou Chou Ching mixes languages as a means of directing their message to specific ethnic communities, Manchuker posits his Mandarin-English alloy as a "common language" with the potential to unite not just disparate communities in Taiwan, but also the more expansive East and West. He does not seek to assert difference as the others do, but turns to multilingual rap to illuminate that which is shared across boundaries. If Chang Jui-chuan uses English to caution listeners about the dark sides of global capitalism, Manchuker uses English to beckon the West ever closer.

Mining the Musical and Poetic Possibilities of Mandarin: The Tripoets

In spite of the better efforts of artists like MC Hotdog and Soft Lipa, community members with whom I spoke suggested with striking consistency that Mandarin, though at this point most easily understood by the greatest number of people on the island, is less well suited to rap than Hoklo or, in some cases, Hakka. Two perspectives tended to underlie this point of view: 1) Mandarin is regarded as, historically, the "oppressor's language" and therefore lacking the "resistant" quality of Taiwan's formerly suppressed local tongues; and 2) the greater the number of tones in a language, the more likely rap in that language is to enable a satisfying sense of flow and a feeling of musicality. Since I have already written at length about the politics of language in Taiwan rap, I reflect briefly here on the latter idea, which prevailed not only among audiences but also artists, including several of the aforementioned Mandarin-language MCs.

That Mandarin-language rap should not resemble *shulaibao* is a maxim widely accepted by members of the community, but some artists argue that the more limited tonal palette of Mandarin need not, in and of itself, pose an obstacle to performers. Ill Mo of the Tripoets, for example, admits that producing convincing rap in Mandarin is difficult, but maintains that one's success or failure in that endeavor is ultimately a matter of experience and skill:

> We all went through that discussion, in the early stage, when MC Hotdog first came out. The discourse was, is it the language that makes Mandarin rap so difficult? Is [Hoklo] more suitable for rapping? And after all we come to the conclusion that it's not a problem with the language, it's what you make of it. It's the way you…At first, of course we were beginners, we didn't know how to put words together or make it sound right. Sometimes when your word's on the paper it looks dope, but when you say it, you couldn't get it right…what you imagine it to sound like, therefore you sound like a beginner of not making it flow and it's dead.[111]

The Tripoets, who rap exclusively in Mandarin, have been working to "make it sound right" for the better part of a decade now. Their express project is to experiment with the possibilities of the language, to find new ways of tapping its poetic qualities while also mining its musicality.

This impulse springs in part from an early and formative exposure to the work of American hip-hop educator and performer Toni Blackman. Back in the early 2000s, when the members of the Tripoets were still college students acquainted through joint participation in Master U and the NTU Hip-Hop Culture Research Society, they attended a lecture delivered by Blackman. She had come to Taiwan under the auspices of Jazz at

[111] Ill Mo 老莫, personal interview, 3 March 2010.

Lincoln Center's Musical Ambassador program and was hosted by the American Institute in Taiwan, a non-profit corporation that performs consular and cultural exchange functions on the island in lieu of an official American embassy. Accompanied by several instrumentalists, Blackman performed spoken word poetry, rapped, sang, and then spoke to the audience about the creative processes that underlie hip-hop. Teacher Lin found the lecture riveting, and it prompted him to rethink his approach to songwriting: "That was very inspiring. That was when we [learned] that [rap] can be a poetry-like form, hip-hop lyrics in [Mandarin]." Ill Mo added: "But we never really knew how to knock down the doors to grasp the essence of it. But after the lecture…we tried to follow her instructions and do it ourselves."[112] Lin and Mo both have degrees in literature—a bachelor's and master's, respectively—and have attempted in the years since seeing Blackman to mine the poetic possibilities of the Mandarin language in their work with the Tripoets. In conversations about Mandarin-language rap at the NTU Hip-Hop Culture Research Society, Lin would talk about "bringing the old-school 'Song of Everlasting Regret'" (*Changhenge* 長恨歌), a reference to a well known long-form narrative poem from the Tang dynasty, written in CE 806 by Bai Juyi (白居易).[113] According to Ill Mo, Lin "basically interpreted the writing into a rap form, so it would sound exactly like spoken word." It wasn't quite hip-hop, Mo acknowledges, but it was an interesting early

[112] Teacher Lin 林老師, personal interview, 12 February 2010.

[113] Shortee 小個, personal interview, 3 March 2010. In brief, "Song of Everlasting Regret" explores the love affair of Tang Emperor Xuanzhong (唐玄宗) with legendary beauty Yang Guifei (楊貴妃), who died tragically during the of Anshi Rebellion (*Anshi zhiluan* 安史之亂) in 755 CE.

experiment in thinking through how Mandarin could be made to sound more rap-like when read aloud.

The Tripoets are interested in showing that Mandarin can indeed be a suitable language for rap, in spite of its associations with *shulaibao*. They accomplish this in part by emphasizing rap's relationship to both written poetry and African-American spoken word traditions rather than Chinese oral narrative performance, as in this excerpt from the 2008 song "Poem" (*Shi* 詩):[114]

我是一名饒舌歌手又名 街頭詩人
倉頡創造文字我讓他的意義無限延伸
激發自己的潛能傳達思想給世人
寫成詩灌注靈魂變成詞渾然天成
遞給我紙筆我從來不遲疑不休息 所以
我揮動筆桿不用竿弟來提
我祈求世界和平有顆甘地的心
筆桿槍桿哪支大你不用擔這個心
如果寸字是寸金 我就是人形印鈔機
字字珠璣一語道破天機

I'm a rapper, also known as a street poet
Cangjie created Chinese characters, I extend their meaning without limits
unleashing my potential to tell my thoughts to the world
written as poetry they fill the soul, transformed into lyrics they seem right and natural
hand me a pen and paper, I won't hesitate, won't rest, so
I swing my pen like a golf club but I don't need no caddy
I call for world peace with a heart like Gandhi
if an inch of language is an inch of gold, then I'm a human printer
every word is a pearl, a phrase reveals divine truths

In this verse, Ill Mo refers to Cangjie (倉頡), the mythological creator of Han characters, and in doing so establishes a link between contemporary Mandarin-language rap and a long history of literary creativity. He utilizes four-word idiomatic expressions called

[114] Tripoets 參劈, "Shi" 詩 [Poem], *Yayunde kaishi* 押韻的開始 [The beginning of rhymes], Rock Records, 2008, compact disc.

chengyu (成語), underlined in both the Mandarin and English translation texts above, that have roots in pre-modern Chinese literature and have occupied a place in erudite discourse for centuries. By using the pen as a symbol of his activities, he aligns himself with the tradition of Chinese written poetry, and more broadly world written poetry, as opposed to oral narrative performance genres like *shulaibao*. Ill Mo's delivery of these lyrics draws inspiration from the American spoken word and rap traditions: he instantiates a smooth, restrained speech-effusive flow with off-beat accents; irregularly placed rhymes, as in the sequence of the end-rhymes *xin* (心, "heart") and the internal rhyme *jin* (金, "gold"); and rhythmic units that spill beyond the established metrical unit. Musical accompaniment to his voice—slow-moving chords performed by a synthesizer that suggests a vintage Fender Rhodes—is soft and melodic, a far cry from the sharp percussiveness of the *ban*, or clappers, that typically accompany *shulaibao*.

* * *

In the first half of Part Three, I have focused on describing the means by which rap stories are told, or what Chatman would call the "discourse" of Taiwan rap narrative. I began with an overview of issues related to vocal performance, zooming in on Adam Krims' three different styles of flow—sung rhythmic, speech-effusive, and percussion-effusive—and discussing their manifestations in selected works by Blacklist Workshop, Soft Lipa, and Dog G. As in American rap, speech-effusive flows seem to predominate among artists on the island, a state of affairs that I attribute partly to the sustained popularity of American hip-hop and the idealization of "smooth" sounds in tonal language rap among local artists. In particular, Mandarin-language MCs are eager to dissociate their work from the traditional musical narrative genre *shulaibao*, which is

distinguished by its straight rhythms and the markedly "angular" sound of its vocal performances. I then provided an overview of practices related to musical accompaniment, including sampling, interpolation, the use of environmental and other non-musical sonorities, and live instruments. Following this consideration of musical sound, I proceeded to a discussion of language. This focused first on the politics of language in Taiwan rap, in particular the use of formerly suppressed languages by artists like Chang Jui-chuan and the performance of multilingual rap by artists like Kou Chou Ching, Witness, and Manchuker. I concluded with a consideration of how groups like the Tripoets are attempting to overcome Mandarin's reputation for being tonemically limited by stressing its long history as a language for poetry and experimenting with performance styles that suggest African-American traditions of spoken word more than Chinese traditions of oral narrative performance.

THE STORIES TAIWAN'S RAPPERS TELL

As I have established, individuals become involved in rap for a variety of reasons: they feel a visceral connection to rap as a genre, as listeners and, in some cases, as performers; they discover within rap a compelling means of learning about and playing creatively with linguistic and cultural signifiers; they locate within the community sources of identity, support, and fellowship. Moreover, many performers gravitate to rap because, as Chang Jui-chuan put it, they "have a message," something that they feel compelled to say. Rap is intensely communicative, permitting a remarkable density of lyrical content, making possible complex expression in tonal language, and facilitating rich intertextual allusion within its musical structures. Having discussed at length these aspects of what Chatman would call "discourse," it is both intuitive and imperative that

we turn our attention finally to the messages themselves, the stories.

To appreciate fully the stories that rappers tell, it is fruitful to recall the span of time that Taiwan rap has traversed since its beginnings, a period within which these stories are embedded and upon which they reflect. Blacklist Workshop's *Songs of Madness* emerged just after the end of martial law in 1989, followed closely by the LA Boyz and The Party in the early 1990s, Jutoupi's *Funny Rap* series in the mid-1990s, MC Hotdog and Dog G's first releases at the beginning of the 2000s, and numerous other recordings by a variety of artists in the ensuing decade. This period coincided with sweeping socioeconomic and political transformations on the island, including but not limited to the consolidation of democratic processes, embrace of multiculturalism as official policy, oscillation in the tenor of cross-Strait relations, and intensification of fears about Taiwan's solvency and sovereignty in light of China's rise to global prominence. Some artists comment explicitly on these and other major phenomena, while others tell personal stories that refer more obliquely to the world outside their immediate orbits. Certain stories—those that are profane, politically transgressive, or characterized by bitterness and grief—reflect their tellers' desires to test the limits of permissible discourse and indeed celebrate the freedom of speech instituted after the end of martial law. These stories comment on their times by virtue of their very existence.

I conclude this section by briefly examining three story types that proliferate in Taiwan rap and that, I argue, instantiate strategies for self-actualization and community empowerment in the years after the end of martial law. I will focus on the themes and content that define these types, and my discussion will also draw on the analytical parameters that I established in the previous sections on musical sound (vocal

performance and accompaniment to the voice) and language. By interpreting these stories using the tools I have set out, I illuminate how their authors respond to the conditions in which they live, make sense of the world they see around them, and claim senses of agency and control over personal and community circumstances. The corpus of Taiwan rap, I argue, is best understood in terms of the desires of its interpretive community—a population that is predominantly young, male, and middle class—to play some part in defining the meaning of their lives amidst the broad-based changes I have described and continued uncertainty about Taiwan's future amidst ongoing political and economic fluctuations.

The narrative interpretations I offer here are certainly not the only ones possible, but they are based on extensive conversations with members of the community as well as what I have come to understand of the social, political, and historical contexts in which the songs under discussion were produced. Moreover, the categories of stories I propose constitute only a small selection from among many possibilities. I restrict my focus to stories that are broadly about history, gender and sexuality, and the vicissitudes of everyday life because of what I feel is their power and popularity among community members, and because of my own strong responses to them as a listening subject. Future work might explore a variety of additional narrative types, taking into account the many stories Taiwan's rappers tell about partying, interpersonal conflict, the decline of the natural environment, and even the more reflexive category of rap stories that are themselves about the singular pleasures of rap storytelling.

Stories About History

The content of and control over Taiwan's historical record have been sources of

contention since the Japanese colonial period. Writing about early-twentieth-century Taiwanese responses to the inequalities and hierarchies endemic to colonial rule, historian Komagome Takeshi commented on the ways in which the "narration of history is a space of power/knowledge contestations."[115] During Taiwan's tenure as a Japanese territory, authorities seeking to weave the island into the fabric of the Empire impressed upon the peoples of Taiwan the primacy of Japanese history and the absolute imperative of knowing their place in it. Recipients of a colonial education were taught almost nothing about Taiwan before it was ceded to Japan in 1895 as part of extensive acculturation and assimilation policies.[116] In *Is Taiwan Chinese? The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities*, anthropologist Melissa Brown strikes a similar note to Komagome in her use of the phrase "narratives of unfolding," which describes the process whereby governments and "ethnic leaders" "draw heavily on selected historic sociopolitical events to galvanize support around claimed ancestry and/or culture"[117] in an attempt to "shape our understanding of the past for political purposes."[118] Following the end of the Second World War and the arrival of the KMT, the island's peoples were asked to subscribe to yet another historical narrative, one that

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[115] Komagome Takeshi, "Colonial Modernity for an Elite Taiwanese, Lim Bo-seng: The Labyrinth of Cosmopolitanism," in *Taiwan Under Japanese Colonial Rule, 1895-1945: History, Culture, Memory*, ed. Liao Ping-hui and David Der-wei Wang (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 145.

[116] Faye Yuan Kleeman, "Gender, Ethnography, and Colonial Cultural Production: Nishikawa Mitsuru's Discourse on Taiwan," in *Taiwan Under Japanese Colonial Rule*, 298.

[117] Melissa Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese?: The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 5.

[118] Ibid., 6.

tied their pasts—and, by implication, their futures—ineluctably to China's. For the better part of four decades, authorities policed all manner of academic and artistic expression on the island. Stories that threatened the mandate of the KMT, for example accounts of the 2-28 Incident, were suppressed by government agents eager to purge them from the historical record.[119] For the better part of a century until the end of martial law, local Taiwanese histories were rendered largely invisible by those holding political and military jurisdiction over the island.

In the immediate post-martial law period, artists and intellectuals responded to long-simmering desires to tell previously suppressed stories, many of them historical in nature. As literature and film scholar Sylvia Li-chun Lin notes: "Only after martial law was lifted in 1987 were [the nation's citizens] able to freely and openly reflect on the injustices of the past four decades. Consequently, since then, literary, scholarly, historical, personal, and cinematic accounts of the past have mushroomed..."[120] Although music is conspicuously absent from Lin's list of media, composers working in a variety of idioms have been eager participants in the new project of representing Taiwanese history, from Tyzen Hsiao's neo-Romantic vocal and orchestral works *1947 Overture* (1993) and *Ilha Formosa Requiem* (2001), to black metal band Chthonic's albums *Seediq*

[119] See Sylvia Li-chun Lin, *Representing Atrocity in Taiwan: The 2/28 Incident and White Terror in Fiction and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

[120] Lin, *Representing Atrocity*, 6. Sociologist A-chin Hsiau has written about how these kinds of historical narratives have, through the medium of literature, "typically played a major role in identity construction and collective action based on ethnicity and nationalism" on the island. Hsiau invokes narrative theory, including the ideas of Ricoeur and Barthes, in the formation of a theoretical approach he terms "narrative identity." See A-chin Hsiau, "The Indigenization of Taiwanese Literature: Historical Narrative, Strategic Essentialism, and State Violence," in *Cultural, Ethnic, and Political Nationalism in Contemporary Taiwan: Bentuhua*, ed. John Makeham and A-chin Hsiau (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 125-155.

Bale (2005), *Mirror of Retribution* (2009), and *Takasago Army* (2011).[121] In recent years, accounts of the past have proliferated among a contingent of socially and politically engaged rap musicians, including Dog G, Kou Chou Ching, Chang Jui-chuan, Ti-Ho Brothers, and Dai Shiyao and Playa Club. The stories these artists tell about history approach the baroque in their scope and intricacy, taking advantage of rap's penchant for lyrical density and the capacity of sampling and interpolation to reference historical soundscapes. Martial law might have ended twenty-five years ago, but many rap artists continue to feel as though there is significant work to be done (re-)educating the younger generations about Taiwan's past, particularly as surveys show that economic anxieties have overtaken concerns about the viability of democratic processes and maintenance of political rights and civil liberties among Taiwan's youth.[122]

The members of Kou Chou Ching, who spoke extensively to me in interviews about the ways in which they felt that the Taiwanese educational system had failed to provide them with an adequate understanding of local histories, have been particularly interested in performing music about the past as a form of corrective pedagogy. In the liner notes to their 2008 album *Kou!! It's Coming Out!!!*, they provide an introductory text (in both Mandarin and English translation) describing their motivations for writing

[121] Hsiao's *1947 Overture* takes the 2-28 Incident as its central conceit, and *Ilha Formosa Requiem* focuses on historical suffering, especially during the period of the White Terror. Chthonic's albums also explore painful episodes in the island's history, including the 2-28 Incident (*Mirror of Retribution*) and the experiences of Taiwan's Aboriginal Seediq people during the period of Japanese colonization (*Seediq Bale* and *Takasago Army*).

[122] Shelley Rigger, *Taiwan's Rising Rationalism: Generations, Politics, and "Taiwanese Nationalism"* (Washington, DC: East-West Center Washington, 2006), 27; 31-33; 53-55.

the song "Civil Revolt, Part 1" (*Guanbiminfan* Part 1 官逼民反 Part 1),[123] about the origins of interethnic conflict among Hoklo and Hakka peoples during the Qing dynasty:

> Perhaps you've often heard people say, "Taiwanese people should know about Taiwanese history." That's right, we all have a place in Taiwanese history, but how much do you really know about Taiwan? From elementary school onwards, people of our generation have studied Chinese history and world history, but how much did we study Taiwanese history? You might be able to able to recite the histories of each and every empire in China; you might be able to tell me when each important event happened in the West. But how much do you understand about Taiwan, this place where you grew up? Because we have such questions, we have started to put together a series of stories about Taiwan. In this first part, we want to talk about Taiwan during the Ching Dynasty (1636-1912)…If we use the past as a mirror for the present, won't we see that if Taiwanese people work together, we won't repeat the tragedies of the past?[124]

Kou Chou Ching's text critiques Sino- and Western-centric approaches to teaching history in Taiwan, and offers a "series of stories"—of which "Civil Revolt, Part 1" is the first—to listeners who wish to know more about "this place where [they] grew up." The

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[123] Kou Chou Ching 拷秋勤 ft. Chang Jui-chuan 張睿銓, "Guanbiminfan, Part 1" 官逼民反 Part 1) [Civil revolt part 1], *Kao! Chulaile* 拷！出來了 [Kou!! It's coming out!!!], independent release, 2008, compact disc.

[124] Kou Chou Ching 拷秋勤, Liner Notes, *Kao! Chulaile* 拷！出來了 [Kou!! It's coming out!!!], independent release, 2008, compact disc. The Mandarin text reads as follows: "'台灣人，不可不知台灣事'，這句話或許你常常聽到，沒錯，在台灣的歷史上我們大家都是占有那樣的一席之地，不過你對台灣瞭解的又有多少呢？在我們這一代的教育中，你從小學習歷史課程，有中國史，世界史，台灣史的比例又有多少呢？你也許可以背出中國各個朝代的演進，你也許可以背出國外何時發生重大的事件，但是對於台灣，這塊你從小長到大的土地，你瞭解多少？ 正是本著這個精神，所以我們開始打造一連串關於台灣的故事，這是第一部，我們要來說說清朝統治下的台灣。。。古可鑑今，台灣人唯有團結一致，才不會重踏歷史後塵。" Notably, this text echoes questions about the listener's familiarity with Taiwan's history and culture in the liner notes for Blacklist Workshop's *Songs of Madness*, released almost two decades earlier.

lessons the group offers are not merely intended to provide educational enrichment for listeners, however, but to perform a public service: by encouraging introspection about the past, Kou Chou Ching suggests that it may be possible for Taiwan's diverse peoples to break free from centuries-long cycles of interethnic conflict.

Fan Chiang explained to me that it took the group nearly three years of intermittent study, during which they confronted the lacunae in their own educations and sharpened their knowledge of local history, to write "Civil Revolt, Part 1."[125] The piece, composed and performed in collaboration with Chang Jui-chuan, encourages present-day listeners to remain attentive to failures of government and to engage in social and political protest when it is called for. Hoklo, Hakka, and Mandarin lyrics to the entire track are provided below, first in Han characters, followed by an English translation:[126]

副歌

(河洛語、華語)

政府刁難 人民起度爛 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
推翻腐敗 台灣人造反 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
政府刁難 人民起度爛 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
推翻腐敗 台灣人造反 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*

(張睿銓)

(河洛語)

聖經創世記有講 古早只有一種語言
也無南北東西不同的口音
你和我也攏是兄弟姊妹
無誤會 無怨仇 無戰爭

世間人過得太爽驕傲靠勢 挑戰上帝
起一個巴別城 起一個巴別塔
塔頂愈起愈高 凶凶就要遇到天

[125] Fan Chiang, personal interview.

[126] Translation completed in collaboraton with Chang Jui-chuan.

耶和華生氣 空氣變冷支支

忽然間你講什 我完全聽攏無
祂考驗世間人的智慧 包容 和謙虛
給咱一世人就要想辦法了解我和你
了解不同的語言 文化 意見 和聲音

什麼時候咱的政府才會了解
過去的錯誤可以原諒但是不可忘記
無正義就無真正的和平
無真正的慈悲 無真正的良知

副歌

(河洛語、華語)
政府刁難 人民起度爛 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
推翻腐敗 台灣人造反 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
政府刁難 人民起度爛 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
推翻腐敗 台灣人造反 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*

Fish Lin

(河洛語)
綁著頭鬃尾仔 咱兮皇帝住北京
大清帝國彼呢大 台灣歸去放乎爛
人講做官若清廉 食飯就愛澆鹽
貪污嘛無啥 只是提濟提少爾爾

日子愈來愈歹過 百姓逐家頭黎黎
一隻牛剝兩層皮 稅金蘇州兮兩倍
官員勾結好額人 來欺負古意人
辛苦了歸落冬 最後攏是白了工
濁水溪 若清 革命就欲來發生
欺人太甚 逼著百性出來摒
生死已經看 輕 殺 頭嘛無要緊
管伊復明不復明 一定愛反清

唐山兵仔啥攏未曉 上敖就是搏繳
羅漢腳仔地方角頭 撞嘎伊糜糜卯卯
發生代誌找無人帶頭 原來已經落跑
靠政府無效 義民自己出來喬

副歌

(河洛語、華語)

政府刁難 人民起度爛 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
推翻腐敗 台灣人造反 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
政府刁難 人民起度爛 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
推翻腐敗 台灣人造反 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*

(范姜)

(華語)

清朝政府私編台灣 只為功績不予管理
官逼民亂 這是個動盪的年代
朱一貴 林爽文 還有戴潮春
對抗滿清腐敗 這就是官逼民反

(客家話)

毋過 佢政府正實當奸詐
用台灣人同台灣人相打
河洛 客家 冤家 相打
毋知恁就係滿清政府抵做分化

(華語)

泉州漳州 客家 各據一方
一邊起義 另外兩邊幫滿清對抗
勇敢的台灣人 把槍口放錯方向
幫助外人削弱自己同胞的力量

(客家話)

兩三百年過忒 還有幾多人會記得
恁等為 台灣打拚介革命先烈
一擺又一擺 做錯介事又一擺
團結精神介台灣人 才有將來

副歌

(河洛語、華語)

政府刁難 人民起度爛 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
推翻腐敗 台灣人造反 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
政府刁難 人民起度爛 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
推翻腐敗 台灣人造反 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*

Opera Singer

(河洛語)

官逼民反
官逼民反
官逼民反
官逼民反

Opera Singer/范姜, Fish Lin
(河洛語、華語)
官逼民反 /政府刁難 人民起度爛 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
官逼民反 /推翻腐敗 台灣人造反 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
官逼民反 /政府刁難 人民起度爛 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*
官逼民反 /推翻腐敗 台灣人造反 *ho! ho! ho! ho!*

*　　*　　*

Chorus
(Hoklo, Mandarin)
the government creates difficulties, the people must rise up, ho! ho! ho! ho!
overthrow corruption, Taiwanese people rebel, ho! ho! ho! ho!
the government creates difficulties, the people must rise up, ho! ho! ho! ho!
overthrow corruption, Taiwanese people rebel, ho! ho! ho! ho!

Chang Jui-chuan
(Hoklo)
in Genesis it says that in the beginning there was only one language
there were no different accents from south, north, east, and west
you and I were brother and sister
there was no misunderstanding, no hatred, no war

but the people of the world lived too indulgently and pridefully, challenging God
erected the city of Babylon, erected a tower of Babel
the tower got higher and higher, almost reaching heaven
the Lord was angered, the air turned cold

suddenly, I had to ask what you were saying, I didn't understand at all
God tested the people's wisdom, their openness, and their modesty
compelled us to spend our lifetimes finding ways to understand each other
understand our different languages, cultures, opinions, and voices

when will our government understand
the mistakes of the past can be forgiven, but not forgotten
without justice, there can be no real peace
without real mercy, there can be no good conscience

Chorus

(Hoklo, Mandarin)
the government creates difficulties, the people must rise up, ho! ho! ho! ho!
overthrow corruption, Taiwanese people rebel, ho! ho! ho! ho!
the government creates difficulties, the people must rise up, ho! ho! ho! ho!
overthrow corruption, Taiwanese people rebel, ho! ho! ho! ho!

Fish Lin
(Hoklo)
tie your hair in a queue, our emperor lives in Beijing
the Qing empire is so big, Taiwan is just left to rot
it is said that if the officials were clean, they'd just eat rice with salt
they're all corrupt, only some steal more and some steal less

life's a bitch, people's heads ache
a cow only has only one skin but is skinned twice, just as the taxes are doubled in Suzhou
government officials conspire with the rich to defraud honest people
working hard for so many years, in the end they still have nothing left

when the Loh Tsuei River is clear, a revolution will happen
when pushed too far, then the people rise up
we don't care if we live or die, if we are beheaded
we don't care if Ming dynasty is restored, we must fight the Qing!

soldiers from the mainland know nothing about fighting, they're only good at gambling
they are just rejects and mobsters, messing around
when something goes down, no one assumes leadership because the leaders have fled
relying on the government is useless, the people need to fight for themselves

Chorus
(Hoklo, Mandarin)
the government creates difficulties, the people must rise up, ho! ho! ho! ho!
overthrow corruption, Taiwanese people rebel, ho! ho! ho! ho!
the government creates difficulties, the people must rise up, ho! ho! ho! ho!
overthrow corruption, Taiwanese people rebel, ho! ho! ho! ho!

Fan Chiang
(Mandarin)
the Qing government annexed Taiwan just for gain, but they don't manage it
the government pushed the people into chaos, giving rise to a time of unrest
Zhu Yigui, Lin Shuangwen, and Dai Chaochun
rebelled against Qing corruption, this is their civil revolt

(Hakka)
but the government was very devious
turning Taiwanese against Taiwanese
Hoklo, Hakka, quarrel and fight one another

we didn't know the Qing government wanted to divide us

(Mandarin)
Quanzhou, Zhangzhou, Hakka, they all have their territory
on one side there was revolution, and on the other side assistance for the government of the Manchus
the brave people of Taiwan turned their guns in the wrong direction
helped the outsiders weaken the power of their compatriots

(Hakka)
two or three hundred years have passed, how many still remember
the revolutionary martyrs who died for Taiwan
again and again, mistakes are made again
united together, only then will we have a future

Chorus
(Hoklo, Mandarin)
the government creates difficulties, the people must rise up, ho! ho! ho! ho!
overthrow corruption, Taiwanese people rebel, ho! ho! ho! ho!
the government creates difficulties, the people must rise up, ho! ho! ho! ho!
overthrow corruption, Taiwanese people rebel, ho! ho! ho! ho!

Opera Singer
(Hoklo)
civil revolt
civil revolt
civil revolt
civil revolt

Opera Singer / Fan Chiang, Fish Lin
(Hoklo, Mandarin)
civil revolt / the government creates difficulties, the people must rise up, ho! ho! ho! ho!
civil revolt / overthrow corruption, Taiwanese people rebel, ho! ho! ho! ho!
civil revolt / the government creates difficulties, the people must rise up, ho! ho! ho! ho!
civil revolt / overthrow corruption, Taiwanese people rebel, ho! ho! ho! ho!

"Civil Revolt, Part 1," opens with a statement of the chorus, a once-repeated rhyming couplet that issues a rousing call to "Taiwanese people" to rebel against government corruption. Chang Jui-chuan then launches into the first Hoklo-language verse, which invokes the story of the Tower of Babel from the Book of Genesis as an allegory for present-day multilingual, multiethnic Taiwan. The target of Chang's critique is not

diversity in and of itself—indeed, he seems hopeful that Taiwan's peoples will meet the challenge of finding ways to "understand our different languages, cultures, opinions, and voices"—but the feelings of linguistic and ethnic difference that have historically been a factor in conflicts among disparate Hoklo and Hakka groups. As Kou Chou Ching suggests in later verses, the various governments that have controlled the island over the years fomented and profited from this sense of difference, impeding the development of a united "Taiwanese" identity that might have opposed colonial domination.

Following Chang's four verses and another statement of the chorus, Fish Lin enters with the fifth Hoklo verse, which effects a shift in time to the end of the seventeenth century, when the Qing Emperor Kangxi annexed Taiwan. Prior to 1683, Han inhabitants of the island were Ming loyalists, fighting the Dutch East India Company (VOC) for control of Formosa and, under the leadership of Koxinga (*Zheng Chenggong* 鄭成功), resisting the Manchu-ruled Qing. Having defeated Koxinga, the Qing incorporated Taiwan into Fujian Province and did relatively little thereafter to govern the island. Fish Lin refers to the mandate that men show submission to the Beijing-based Kangxi Emperor by following the so-called "tonsure decree," shaving off their hair at the front of their heads and braiding the rest into a long queue that trailed down their backs. Otherwise, however, "Taiwan [was] just left to rot" and chaos reigned: the island was rife with coastal piracy, political dissident activities, and ongoing disputes with Aborigines over land and natural resources.[127] This disorder exacerbated conflict within the ethnically diverse Han group. Until 1895, 98 percent of Taiwan's Han immigrants came

[127] Harry J. Lamley, "Subethnic Rivalry in the Ch'ing Period," in *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society*, ed. Emily Martin Ahern and Hill Gates (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1981),289-90.

from Fujian or Guangdong provinces; census surveys from the early twentieth century suggest that 82 percent of this group were Hoklo and 16 percent were Hakka.[128] As Melissa Brown notes: "The Taiwan frontier had a reputation for feuds (*xiedou* [械鬥])—between Hoklo and Hakka, among Hoklo with different places of origin (e.g. Zhangzhou and Quanzhou), and among Quanzhou groups of Hoklo as well."[129] Members of the various Hakka and Hoklo communities tended to cluster together in kinship and surname groups; the bloody feuds that arose frequently between these groups were, as historian Harry Lamley writes, "an appropriate form of conflict for rival communities contending in an insecure environment plagued by disorder and weak government."[130] As Fish Lin moves into the sixth verse, he describes the corruption of Qing authorities, overtaxing and "[conspiring] with the rich to defraud honest people." The seventh and eighth verses refer to increasing frustration at this corruption on the part of the Hoklo and Hakka, whom Lin cries out ought to have rebelled against the government representatives exploiting them.

Following a third repetition of the chorus, Fan Chiang enters with verses nine through twelve, which alternate between Mandarin and Hakka languages. The ninth verse restates some of what Fish Lin has just argued, namely that the Qing government did little to govern the island effectively but instead "pushed the people into chaos, giving rise to a time of unrest." Fan Chiang then invokes the names of three individuals—Zhu Yigui (朱一貴), Lin Shuangwen (林爽文), and Dai Chaochun (戴潮春)—who led three

[128] Ibid., 291.

[129] Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese*, 51.

[130] Lamley, "Subethnic Rivalry," 315.

major popular rebellions against the Qing. The tenth and eleventh verses, in Hakka and Mandarin, suggest that it was the Qing government's desire not merely to govern lackadaisically and ineffectively, but to actually encourage feuding among Hoklo and Hakka groups. Kou Chou Ching emphasizes this notion in the introductory text for the song: "After a short time, uprisings occurred everywhere, and the Man-Chus skillfully played the conflicts among Chuan-Chou, Chang-Chou, and Hakka people to control Taiwan for over 200 years. During this time, there were too many revolts to count. However, the Ching court employed many 'volunteers,' using Chuan-Chou, Chang-Chou, and Hakka people to oppress each other."[131] Fan Chiang decries the dividedness of the Hoklo and Hakka under such conditions, noting that "the brave people of Taiwan turned their guns in the wrong direction"—that is, at one another—ultimately assisting Qing efforts to subjugate them. The twelfth and final verse takes listeners back the present, asking how many remember "revolutionary martyrs" like Zhu, Lin, and Dai. Fan Chiang ends the piece by suggesting that interethnic conflict remains a problem on the island and encourages Taiwan's peoples to look past their differences because "united together, only then will [they] have a future." Following Fan Chiang's final verse, the chorus returns several more times, followed by the voice of an uncredited female vocalist, who sings the title phrase "civil revolt, civil revolt" over and over again atop further repetitions of the chorus performed by Fish Lin and Fan Chiang.

"Civil Revolt, Part 1" is a protest anthem that puts historical narrative in dialogue with post-martial law politics, encouraging present-day listeners to learn from the

[131] Kou Chou Ching 拷秋勤, Liner Notes, *Kao! Chulaile* 拷！出來了 [Kou!! It's coming out!!!], independent release, 2008, compact disc.

tragedies of life under the Qing and practice civil disobedience when they sense their government has not worked in their best interests. The song's discursive dimensions—its sonic qualities—are critical to Kou Chou Ching's storytelling, creating the senses of drama, urgency, and tension essential to mobilizing the performers' message and infusing it with affective power. Overall, the piece is heavily textured, its sound-world thick with activity, including the very different voices of three different MCs working in different languages, environmental and other non-musical sonorities, live instruments, samples of traditional music, and vinyl scratch sounds. Each of these elements supports not only the anthemic qualities of the song, but also punctuates and illustrates the progress of the narrative.

The piece opens with the sample of a *guzheng*, or plucked zither, playing a figure consisting of a rapidly ascending and descending pentatonic scale, and evocative of flowing water, a sonic effect for which the instrument is traditionally prized. In the introductory text that Kou Chou Ching provides for the piece, the group notes that this gesture is intended to illustrate the motion not of flowing water, but of "flying banners on battlements of old."[132] Regardless, the figure is the first instance of tone painting in "Civil Revolt, Part 1," in which an instrumental or environmental sonority contributes to creating the backdrop against which the vocal performance unfolds. Here the vocals have not yet entered; there is no beat or underlying rhythm, and the *guzheng* plays freely. Following the *guzheng* figure, the metallic clash of swords crossing propels the listener into the first instance of the track's chorus and into the muscular beat that underlies the majority of the recording. Beyond this opening, the *guzheng* is the source of multiple

[132] Ibid.

motifs, which recur throughout the song's twelve verses. It features prominently in a rising two-note tremolo figure that underpins each verse, provides a counterpoint to a *suona* melody that is introduced during the chorus, and, as an instrument deployed in traditional musics, contributes in all these instances to the sense of history that characterizes the narrative.

The *suona* has an equally significant role to play throughout the piece, as the introductory text explains that the melody it plays "represents the calls to rebellion among Taiwan's inhabitants."[133] Each time that Fish Lin and Fan Chiang repeat the chorus—"The government creates difficulties, the people must rise up / Overthrow corruption, Taiwanese people rebel"—the *suona* wails beneath them like a siren, augmenting the voice of public dissent and creating the sense of imminent emergency. It traces a melodic figure reminiscent of the characteristic opening and closing measures of the "River and Lake Tune" [*kang-oô-tiāu* 江湖調] that is frequently performed as part of traditional vocal musics, including *liām-kua* and, less often, Taiwanese opera. The presence of the *suona*, with its characteristic shrill and reedy sound, marks "Civil Revolt, Part 1" as distinctly local: used in a variety of Taiwanese religious rituals and musico-theatrical forms, the instrument is an integral part of the island's soundscape. Its timbre contrasts with the sound of a third traditional instrument heard once in a momentary pause that immediately follows Chang Jui-chuan's verses, the transverse bamboo flute *dizi* (笛子). The *dizi* introduces a strikingly different tone at this juncture, a mellow and melancholy sound that begs for a moment of contemplation at the end of Chang's sage proclamation that "Without justice, there can be no real peace / Without real mercy, there

[133] Ibid.

can be no good conscience."

Kou Chou Ching employs a variety of sampled, live, and synthesized instrumental sounds, but "Civil Revolt, Part 1" is also rich with environmental and other non-musical sonorities. These vivify several key moments in the narrative, particularly at the start of the piece: the metal clash of swords and sounds of wind gusting accompany the flapping of flags in the breeze suggested by the *guzheng*'s rapidly ascending and descending pentatonic scale; the chopped-up and scratched sample of a man crying out in pain punctuates the moments before the initial statement of the chorus; a horse neighs at the ready as Chang Jui-chuan begins his first verse and Kou Chou Ching perform their final choruses; and the sound of a single water-drop falling interrupts the silence after Chang's fourth verse as the beat drops out and the *dizi* fades. These non-musical sounds not only heighten the sense of drama present in the lyrical text but also lend it a graphic representational quality.

I have noted that speech-effusive flows are currently most prevalent in Taiwan rap in general, but sung rhythmic flows predominate in the performances of all three MCs in "Civil Revolt, Part 1." Although there are moments of spillage beyond the established metrical unit and occasional instances, particularly in Chang's verses, where syntactic units are dissociated from the meter, the performers deliver their texts in a manner that is remarkably rhythmically constant, organized into couplet units that emphasize end rhyme over internal rhyme. In marked contrast to the sense of chaos at the heart of the story the MCs are telling, all three vocal performances sound steady, even, and orderly. This contributes to the anthemic quality of the song and facilitates audience participation in the case of live performance. Kou Chou Ching frequently includes "Civil Revolt, Part 1"

in their sets at shows and strongly encourages audience members to engage physically and vocally, by raising their fists and pumping them along to the beat and joining in where the MCs repeat the rousing non-lexical vocable "ho!" at the end of each line of the chorus. More virtuosic speech-effusive and percussion-effusive flows, which derive power and interest from their unpredictability and irregularity, do not enable this kind of participation as easily. The use of sung rhythmic flows also expands and enriches the song's engagement with history through subtle suggestion of a relationship with old-school hip-hop, the feeling of returning to a bygone era not only in Taiwan's history, but also in rap's.

Kou Chou Ching note in the introductory text to the song that this is the first in a "series of stories about Taiwan"—the second, "Civil Revolt, Part 2" was released in 2012 on the group's album *What's Happening?* (*Fashengle shenme shi?* 發生了甚麼事？).[134] That piece deals with Taiwan's history during the Japanese colonial period, specifically the Xilai Temple Incident (*Xilaian shijian* 西來庵事件) of 1915.[135] A third installment in the series, dealing with civil uprising during the post-War period, is planned for the group's next album.[136] With its release, they will join the company of several other rap artists on the island who have written about the trials and tribulations of Taiwan's peoples following the KMT handover. Indeed, there are a number of songs that focus specifically on the 2-28 Incident and ensuing period of White Terror, including the T-Ho Brothers'

[134] Kou Chou Ching 拷秋勤, *Fashengle shenme shi*? 發生了甚麼事？ [What's happening?], independent release, 2012, compact disc.

[135] The Xilai Temple Incident, sometimes referred to as the Tapani Incident, was a large-scale armed revolt against Japanese colonial authorities.

[136] Fan Chiang, personal interview.

"KMT 1947" (2003), Chang Jui-chuan's "Hey Kid" [*Gín-á* 囡仔] (2006), and Dog G's "1947 0228" (2011).[137]

For many MCs, the task of writing about Taiwan's history dovetails neatly with the hip-hop directive to keep it real. Chang Jui-chuan explained to me in an interview that he wrote "Hey Kid," a gift to his brother's firstborn son, because he hoped to remind his young nephew that the democratic system and civil liberties he might someday take for granted were hard won. As a member of the last generation to receive some part of his formal education before the end of martial law, Chang expressed a strong desire to ensure that the island's youth is knowledgeable about formative—and formerly suppressed—events in Taiwan's history:

> Just imagine this kid siting next to you and you want to tell them a story. What would you say to him? Usually people would go with fables and all that stuff, talking animals. But why not do something about this land, this country, telling a little bit of history?…I think for me it also is about time for stuff like that to come out. This is a time that we don't have to speak metaphorically anymore. Of course I'm not denying the beauty of speaking metaphorically, but for "Hey Kid" I wanted to tell the story honestly. I don't have to be afraid anymore.[138]

I read Chang's desires to "tell the story honestly" and without recourse to metaphor as a statement of determination to represent and keep it real at a time when free speech is a

[137] Ti-Ho Brothers 鐵虎兄弟, "KMT 1947," *Tiehu Xiongdi* 鐵虎兄弟 [Ti-Ho Brothers], Taiwan Colors Music, 2003, compact disc; Chang Jui-chuan 張睿銓, "*Gín-á*" 囡仔 [Hey kid], *Chuangshiji* 創世紀 [Genesis], Adia's, 2006, compact disc; Dog G 大支, "1947 0228," *Ren* 人 [Ren], Kung Fu Entertainment, 2011, compact disc.

[138] Chang Jui-chuan, personal interview, 3 December 2009.

right protected by the ROC Constitution.[139] Prior to liberalization, artists fearing censorship, detention, or imprisonment were compelled to speak in only the vaguest terms about events like 2-28, but Chang and his contemporaries are empowered to tell stories in ways that do not obscure or disguise their subject matter—there is, they feel, no longer a need to shroud the events of history in metaphor.

STORIES ABOUT GENDER AND SEXUALITY

As previously discussed, the Taiwan rap community is dominated by men. This state of affairs is typically explained with recourse to the norms of American hip-hop, which is similarly male-dominated and has often been characterized as sexist, homophobic, and patriarchal. Many performers with whom I spoke also rationalize Taiwan rap's gender practices in terms of a Confucian paradigm that posits women on the island as *nei* (inside) and therefore physically and temperamentally unsuited to performing rap, which is coded as fundamentally *wai* (outside). Demographic representation within the various places and organizations I have thus far described—including university hip-hop culture clubs, Kung Fu Entertainment, and even the online sphere—reflect rap's identity as men's music: I observed, at most, a handful of women at the majority of concerts and special events I attended, and sometimes even counted myself as the lone female in the room. Although I do not wish to sidestep the specific issue of sexism in Taiwan rap—there are certainly misogynist strains in the works of some artists—in this section I am more interested in focusing on the means by which the music functions as a durable outlet for expressions of male subjectivity in the wake of

[139] The right to free speech is protected by Article 11 of the Constitution of the Republic of China. The Constitution actually dates to 1946 but was suspended until the end of martial law in 1987.

considerable socioeconomic change on the island. That is, I focus on how rap is a site for telling stories that reflect on performers' gender and sexual identities vis-à-vis their experiences as artists, lovers, sons, soldiers, and wage-earners, among other things.

It is interesting to read the progression from neophyte to authority figure (or, in the terms I have been using, amateur to professional) in the rap scene as a means of both reproducing and disrupting the broader processes through which "manhood" has traditionally been achieved in Taiwan. Confucian values emphasize the import of filial behavior; as anthropologist Avron Boretz has observed, young men on the island are traditionally "beholden to their fathers (including fictive fathers, those who stand in positions of power and authority) and elder brothers (including fictive brothers), expected to unquestioningly accept their subordination to their elders' authority and the collective interest."[140] It is only following marriage and childrearing that they can hope to "enjoy the advantages of power due to all legitimate representatives of the social order."[141] On one hand, the hierarchical structures of clubs and creative collectives suggests capitulation to a similar system, wherein less experienced or knowledgeable members are subject to the authority of those above them. On the other hand, involvement in the rap scene constitutes an alternative passage to manhood that contravenes some of these norms. Taiwan's rappers frequently challenge authority figures and voice their frustrations at power asymmetries in the music industry, school system, and government—MC Hotdog and Dog G have in fact built their careers on such critique.

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[140] Avron Boretz, "Carousing and Masculinity: The Cultural Production of Gender in Taiwan," in *Women in the New Taiwan: Gender Roles and Gender Consciousness in a Changing Society*, ed. Catherine S.P. Farris, Anru Lee, and Murray Rubinstein (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 175.

[141] Ibid.

Status in the community is conferred on individuals for their mastery of knowledge about rap or for their skill as musicians, not as the inevitable outcome of prolonged subjection to authority.

Socioeconomic changes in progress in Taiwan during this time period may offer an explanation for why alternative pathways to manhood appeal to members of the rap community. Boretz notes the importance of marriage and childrearing in attaining adult status according to traditional worldviews, but young people in Taiwan today are either deferring these lifecycle events or forgoing them altogether. The joint processes of industrialization and economic expansion beginning in the 1950s altered the gendered division of labor, a transformation that gave rise to significant changes in the size, organization, and behavioral habits of the island's families. Since the mid-twentieth century Taiwan's fertility rates have plummeted: the gross reproduction rate in 1956 was 3.16 compared to 0.43 in 2010.[142] In recent years, the drop has triggered national alarm; current government reports predict that by 2060, 48.9% of the population will be between the ages of 15 and 64, and 41.6% of the population will be over the age of 65.[143] As a sample population, the rap community embodies these broader trends to a striking extent. Among the many musicians and fans I interviewed, just a few were married and only three indicated that they had children. If the traditional path to mature adulthood—

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[142] R. Freedman, et al., "The Fertility Transition in Taiwan," in *Social Change and the Family in Taiwan*, ed. Arland Thornton and Hui-Sheng Lin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 265; "Fertility Rates for Women of Childbearing Age," Statistical Bureau of the Republic of China (Taiwan), last modified 2010, http://eng.stat.gov.tw/public/data/dgbas03/bs2/yearbook_eng/y015.pdf.

[143] "Population Projections for R.O.C. (Taiwan): 2012-2060," Council for Economic Planning and Development, last modified 2012, http://www.cepd.gov.tw/encontent/m1.aspx?sNo=0001457.

marriage and childrearing—is not as readily navigable as it once was, the hierarchies and rituals of the rap community offer men a set of alternatives. They need not commit to a spousal partnership, move out of their parents' homes (as indeed many do not), or feather their own nests—the vicissitudes of the economy and Taiwan's workplace culture in some cases preclude these possibilities even when they are desired—in order to be considered legitimate representatives of the social order by their peers in the community. Participation in clubs, creative collectives, ciphers, battles, and related activities are means of self-empowerment and pleasure outside the traditional structures of family and home.

Artists also frequently invoke the masculine ethos of rap to express feelings of anger and resentment towards authority, not just traditional figures like teachers, parents, and law enforcement officers, but also those who hold sway over the Taiwan pop music industry. Indeed, the sense of rap and rap musicians as "real" is inextricable from the sense of rap and rap musicians as "masculine," especially when held up in comparison to Mandopop's so-called idols (*ouxiang* 偶像), who have dominated the Taiwan charts for more than three decades. The 2001 song "Korean Wave Invasion" (*Hanliu laixi* 韓流來襲), which targets the public's infatuation with both K-pop and Mandopop stars, demonstrates the feeling of contempt that songwriters MC Hotdog, Dog G, and MC 168 harbor for Taiwan's bubbly, beautiful, and unremittingly *wenrou* singing sensations:[144]

台灣歌手怎麼唱都是在那邊愛來愛去　所以我在這裡一定要說真實的事情
現在的偶像歌手長的帥長的美麗　就等於可以上台去
什麼都不用會　但要保持笑嘻嘻　沒事幹時還要傻笑裝白癡

[144] MC Hotdog 熱狗 ft. Dog G and MC 168, "Hanliu laixi" 韓流來襲 [Korean wave invasion], *Quan* 犬 [Dog], Magic Stone, 2001, compact disc.

有時眼淚最好一兩滴　博取觀眾同情　那就是他們生存的道理

在電視上看到只是表面　你在裝傻　還是你沒有發現
愛來愛去　實在太假　凍抹掉　所以現在要跳出來罵
我問你要罵什麼？　罵芭樂　你們沒有別的選擇　在這個環境下　長大
每天吃芭樂　一定有一天你吃不下
你的排泄物　一定要拉　本來是從屁股　可是歌手是從嘴巴　Shit from the mouth, shit from the mouth, shit from the mouth!

操你媽個B　操你媽個B　FUCK CLON AND H.O.T
Yuki A-Mei CoCo Lee　Suck Suck Suck.....Suck My Dick
操你媽個B　操你媽個B　FUCK CLON AND H.O.T
Yuki A-Mei CoCo Lee　Suck Suck Suck.....Suck My Dick

*　　*　　*

why are Taiwanese singers always going on about love? So I'm here to keep it real
today's idol singers are good looking, that's how they get on stage
you don't have to do anything, just have to smile and giggle, if you've got nothing else
just grin like an idiot
at times it's best to shed a tear or two, win over the audience, that's a means of survival

on TV you only see the surface, are you playing dumb or have you never realized
their talk about love is totally fake, can't take it, so I'm here to jump up and call them out
call them out on what? on guava! you haven't had choices, growing up like that
each day eating guava, one day you'll get sick of it
you'll have to shit, it should come from the ass, but with singers it's from the mouth
shit from the mouth, shit from the mouth, shit from the mouth!

fuck your mother's cunt, fuck your mother's cunt, FUCK CLON AND H.O.T.
Yuki, A-mei, CoCo Lee, suck suck suck suck…suck my dick
fuck your mother's cunt, fuck your mother's cunt, FUCK CLON AND H.O.T.
Yuki, A-mei, CoCo Lee, suck suck suck suck…suck my dick

The lyrics, arresting in their profanity, take aim at performers whose claim to stardom rests solely on their ability to sing love songs, smile vapidly, and weep opportunistically for gullible audiences. They are, according to the songwriters, shameless purveyors of "guava," Hoklo slang in this context for mediocre and ultimately meaningless claptrap. Things take a particularly vitriolic turn at the chorus: against a repeating fragment of the

stereotyped nine-note pentatonic figure known as the "oriental riff," transcribed below,[145] performer MC Hotdog dares several specific female Mandopop (Yuki Hsu, A-mei, and Coco Lee) *and* male K-pop (Clon and H.O.T.) artists to perform fellatio on him.



Musical Example 5: Transcription of the "oriental riff."

The riff's banality underscores the jejune charm and immediate recognizability of the performers in question as the rapper—who is "here to keep it real"—suggests a punishment of sexual humiliation for their crimes of artificiality. A constellation of associations in opposition to each other emerges from this gesture: the feminine ethos and meaninglessness of Mandopop counters—and is threatened with defilement by—the masculine ethos and meaningfulness of rap.

There are clear misogynistic overtones to "Korean Wave Invasion," but the story the piece tells also spans a much broader, intercontextual narrative arc, one that speaks to the rap community's larger dissatisfactions with Taiwan's musical superculture. The song rails against the requirement that one must be physically attractive, that women must be feminine and men possess the requisite "effeminate masculinity," in

[145] I have located no scholarship that explores the origins of the "oriental riff," sometimes referred to as the "Asian riff" or "Asian jingle." There are, however, several signed and unsigned articles on the Internet that trace the figure to the 1935 Betty Boop cartoon *Making Stars* and locate possible proto-forms in earlier cartoon music and popular tunes such as the Jean Schwartz and William Jerome 1910 classic "Chinatown, My Chinatown." See "The Musical Cliché Figure Signifying the Far East: Whence, Wherefore, Whither?" accessed May 3, 2013, http://chinoiserie.atspace.com/index.html and Peter Micic, "Funky Chinatown and the Asian Riff," Danwei.org, accessed May 3, 2013, http://www.danwei.org/music/funky_chinatown_and_the_asian.php.

Moskowitz's terms, to flourish in the Mandopop star system.[146] MC Hotdog, Dog G, and MC 168—none of whom would be considered handsome by industry standards—perform from the position that life is not always beautiful or uncomplicated, and that there are in fact issues beyond romantic relationships that musicians could or ought to be addressing. More than a decade after the release of "Korean Wave Invasion," artists with whom I spoke continued to remark on their feelings of marginalization from the mainstream popular music industry and their sense that there is little space in it for music and musicians whose work explores what they feel is *real*: darker, more overtly sexual, more critical, and often more vindictive emotional states.

MC Hotdog—whose name, it hardly bears noting, is an explicit phallic reference—distinguished himself at the start of his career by performing songs that issued trenchant social critique, often focused specifically on the life experiences and perspectives of Taiwan's urban male youth population. As he has grown older, however, the rapper has taken on a somewhat different character, one that hews more closely to what Adam Krims would classify as a "mack," or pimp figure. As Krims notes, a mack is "not necessarily a literal pimp…[but] may simply be a man whose confidence, prolificness, and (claimed) success with women mark him as a 'player.'"[147] As the most commercially successful of Taiwan's rappers and a revered progenitor of the scene, MC Hotdog inhabits the role more easily than others—he is prolific and has earned the right to be confident, even cocky, on stage. He also boasts more female fans than many of the island's rappers—indeed, he repeatedly reminds his followers on social media of this fact

[146] Marc L. Moskowitz, *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and its Cultural Connotations* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 89.

[147] Krims, *Rap Music*, 62.

by posting sexually suggestive pictures that various women have sent him, sometimes of themselves holding one of his albums over their naked breasts or genitals. Mack rap is



Figure 16: MC Hotdog performing "I Love Taiwan Girls" (*Wo ai Taimei* 我愛台妹) with female backup dancers, 21 May 2011. Photo by author.

relatively rare in Taiwan, perhaps because although the figure of the player has a long history in African American fiction and poetry, he has no precise local equivalent.[148] MC Hotdog's performance of this role, as in his 2006 collaboration with rock musician Chang

[148] The local figure that perhaps most approximates the mack is the triad boss or gangster, a frequent stock character in Hong Kong and Taiwan film (see, for example, the character of Pao in Peter Chan's 1996 film *Comrades: Almost a Love Story* [*Tian mimi* 甜蜜蜜], or Boss Geta in Doze Niu's 2010 film *Monga* [*Mengxia* 艋舺]). Alternatively, we might imagine the mack as a distant cousin of romantic male characters featured in Chinese martial chivalry (*wuxia* 武俠) novels and films. I would characterize neither the triad boss nor the chivalrous male protagonist of *wuxia*, however, as a particularly *prevalent* model of male gender performance in contemporary Taiwan.

Chen-yue, "I Love Taiwan Girls" (*Wo ai Taimei* 我愛台妹), generates a compelling tension with locally prevalent models of male gender performance.[149] As I have discussed, MC Hotdog criticizes these existing models more directly in songs like "Cram, Cram, Cram," where the target is the academic treadmill and subjection to adult authority figures that adolescent males (and females) are compelled to tolerate, and "Korean Wave Invasion," where he takes aim at a squeaky-clean and sentimental ("effeminate") music industry inhospitable to his own rough, gruff ("masculine") persona. In "I Love Taiwan Girls," arguably the biggest hit of his career, he contemplates what it means to be a mack in a place where such a figure does not exist in the popular imagination.

The song is a declaration of love—simultaneously mocking and affectionate—for women who embody stereotyped notions of specifically local, rural, working-class femininity. Such women are known on the island by the name *taimei* (台妹), which marries the morpheme *tai* (台) of "Taiwan" with the morpheme *mei* (妹), which on its own means "younger sister" but here indicates more generally a young woman or girl without the connotation of kinship. As cultural figures, *taimei* are known for dressing in provocative clothing, wearing extremely high heels and superabundant makeup, using "vulgar" speech, and engaging in intemperate partying and drinking. In the context of Taiwan society, they are roughly analogous to the stereotypical "redneck woman" of the American south, and occupy a social stratum similar to the "guidette" figure of working-class urban Italian America. In this excerpt from "I Love Taiwan Girls," MC Hotdog pleads with a *taimei* who has caught his eye to engage in a romantic dalliance:

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[149] MC Hotdog 熱狗 ft. Chang Chen-yue 張震岳, "Wo ai Taimei" 我愛台妹 [I love Taiwan girls], *Wake Up*, Rock Records, 2006, compact disc.

我不愛中國小姐　我愛台妹　萬萬歲　妳的檳榔2粒要100 好貴　有沒有含睡
如果能夠和妳共枕眠　更多更多的奶粉錢　我願意為妳貢獻　我不是愛現
請妳噴上一點點銷魂的香水　換上妳最性感的高跟鞋　人群之中　妳最亮眼
台妹來了　我是否和妳一拍即合　跟我去很多的不良場合
大家看到我都對我喊yes sir 因為我是公認最屌的rapper
台妹們　麻煩和我拍拖　我不是凱子　可是付錢　也不會囉唆
純情是什麼　我不懂　我的想法很邪惡　張震嶽他懂

我愛台妹　台妹愛我　對我來說　林志玲算什麼
我愛台妹　台妹愛我　對我來說　侯佩岑算什麼

*　　*　　*

I don't love Chinese girls, I love Taiwan girls, long live Taiwan girls, two packets of your betel nuts for $100 is expensive, does that include tax
if I could share a pillow with you, I'd give you plenty of money for baby formula, not that I'm bragging
put on your sexiest perfume, change into your hottest high heels, you'll stand out from the crowd
the Taiwan girl's on the scene, will we hit it off? come with me to lots of shady places
everyone who sees me yells "Yes, sir!" because everyone knows I'm the flyest rapper
Taiwan girls, why not go out with me? I'm no fool, I'll pay the bill,
what's true love? I don't know, my thoughts are twisted, Chang Chen-yue knows what I'm talking about

I love Taiwan girls, Taiwan girls love me, what's Lin Chi-ling to me
I love Taiwan girls, Taiwan girls love me, what's Hou Peicen to me

The verse, which is the second of three, begins on a patriotic note, with the narrator—presumably MC Hotdog himself—declaring that he has no affection for mainland Chinese women, but is instead taken with the emphatically local *taimei*. The rapper then praises the particular *taimei* he is addressing for adorning herself in a manner that suggests one of the island's ubiquitous "betel nut beauties" (*binlang xishi* 檳榔西施), young women who work at the side of the road in small, neon-lit betel nut shops, where

their job is to lure in customers by wearing risqué clothing.[150] The betel nut beauty is, like the *taimei*, an iconic figure on the island, strongly identified with Native Taiwanese working-class culture. As he flatters the *taimei* in question, the rapper propositions her for sex and boasts that he would be able to help support financially any children that might arise from their congress. In a further attempt to entice her, he then suggests that they would be like celebrities at any of the "shady places" (*buliang changhe* 不良場合) to which he might take her—he is, after all, a famous rapper with plenty of fans at his beck and call. Finally, he reiterates that he has the financial resources to pay for the date and concludes by declaring to the listener that his advances do not stem from any romantic impulse; far from it, his thoughts are "twisted" (*xie'e* 邪惡) in a way that surely his collaborator Chang Chen-yue, a fellow man, will understand. Chang Chen-yue chimes in on the two lines of the chorus that follow, singing out that the loves Taiwan girls and they return the sentiment, and suggesting that glamorous celebrity women like model-actress Lin Chi-ling and television presenter Hou Peicen simply do not excite him.

The other two verses of "I Love Taiwan Girls" further elaborate on the virtues of the *taimei*, but the larger story the song tells regards the identity of its male speaker. Indeed, as the guidette is the female counterpart to the male "guido," so is the *taimei* the female counterpart to the male *taike*. The origins of the term *taike*, which brings together the morpheme *tai* (台) of "Taiwan" with the morpheme *ke* (客), meaning "guest," have long been in dispute: some say that *waishengren* newly arrived in Taiwan after the war used it as a pejorative to refer to native Taiwanese men as, literally, "Taiwan guests";

[150] See Annie Liu, "Betelnut Culture in Contemporary Taiwan," *Asia Pacific: Perspectives, An Electronic Journal* IX, no. 2 (June, 2010): 63-68, accessed March 10, 2013, http://usf.usfca.edu/pac_rim/new/research/perspectives/app_v9n2_liu.pdf.

others suggest that the *tai* morpheme refers to the Hoklo people, while the *ke* morpheme refers to the Mandarin term for the Hakka people, *kejiaren* (客家人).[151] Whatever the case may be, to be *taike* carries "implications of being unsophisticated, speaking poor Mandarin Chinese, wearing ill-fitting or mismatched outfits, and other traits that [*waishengren*] felt set the 'local' Taiwanese apart from themselves."[152] The *taike* stereotype is also associated with a number of additional attributes, including being from rural parts of south or central Taiwan, chewing betel nut, sporting tattoos, wearing cheap button-down shirts in floral patterns, smoking, drinking local grain alcohols mixed with plum juice or soda, and driving a customized car or motor scooter.[153] Recent years have seen numerous efforts, particularly among Taiwanese cultural nationalists and politicians, to reclaim and redefine the appellation in more positive ways. There are a number of musicians who wear their associations with *taike* culture as a badge of honor, including rock musician Wu Bai (伍佰) and punk band LTK Commune [*Lô-chúi-khoe kong-siā* 濁水溪公社]. Both Chang Chen-yue, who is of Amis Aboriginal descent, and MC Hotdog, who has *waisheng* heritage, have also come to be identified with *taike* in recent years, as the identity has broadened to include men who are considered to embody a general kind of earthy coolness, sport tattoos, and even wear hip-hop style clothing.[154] As if to cement

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[151] Ken Kieke, "In Search of Taike: Taiwanese Find New Identity in an Old Insult," accessed March 10, 2013, http://www.culture.tw/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1447&Itemid=156.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Jules Quartly, "Taike Sell Out," *Taipei Times*, March 31, 2006, accessed March 10, 2013, http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2006/03/31/2003300209.

their associations with *taike*, MC Hotdog and Chang Chen-yue were two of the headliners of the 2006 T.K. Rock Festival (*Taike yaogun jianianhua* 台客搖滾嘉年華), an all-day concert that celebrated local popular music and deployed sounds and images associated with *taike* culture as part of its marketing campaign.[155]

In performing "I Love Taiwan Girls," MC Hotdog and Chang Chen-yue reimagine the *taike* as a mack-type figure in the hip-hop tradition. Far from finding the identity shameful, they celebrate their attraction to the *taimei* and the various activities and places she represents that connote rural and working-class culture: betel nut chewing, southern Taiwan, heavily Hoklo-accented Mandarin. They do not wish to indulge their desires for her secretly, but call out proudly in the chorus, "I love *taimei*, *taimei* love me!" As it extols the *taike*'s affection for the *taimei*, the song superimposes the lyrical and musical gestures of the quintessential mack rap recording onto this identity. Mack rap—codified by American artists like Too $hort and L.L. Cool J, and described in analytical terms by Krims—has a very distinctive sound, one that is immediately recognizable to many fans of western pop music. Eschewing the "stark, intricate, or uneven" layering that marks other kinds of rap, mack rap favors simpler accompaniments heavily flavored with R&B, in many cases yielding recordings that sound "like an R&B song with a rap track added."[156] To this point, mack rap recordings often feature sung choruses and live instrumentation that is recorded through, rather than samples and beats that are layered

[155] Ibid. It is interesting to note that Mi Chonghua—erstwhile producer of the LA Boyz, The Party, and Jutoupi—was one of the organizers of the T.K. Rock Festival.

[156] Krims, *Rap Music*, 64.

and looped by a sequencer.[157] In this case, the band is Chang Chen-yue's frequent collaborator Free 9, which consists of guitars, bass, and drums, interpolating and slightly transforming the main melody from the Spinners' 1972 hit "I'll Be Around." The song's lyrical content is also strongly suggestive of mack rap, which often features images of wealth and "boasts of sexual prowess and/or attempts at seduction."[158] In American rap, images of conspicuous consumption often revolve around the possession of expensive cars, jewelry, mansions, or yachts. In "I Love Taiwan Girls," however, MC Hotdog boasts in a comic fashion that he has enough to cover the cost of baby formula if necessary—an expenditure that is more in step with what he, a mere *taike*, is able to afford.

Discerning the storytelling qualities of "I Love Taiwan Girls" requires consideration, following Negus, of its position in multiple "social and semiotic chains of narrative meaning."[159] These include, as I have suggested, the narrative meanings and associations that surround the tradition of mack rap, but also a more localized cultural narrative about the reclamation and re-imagination of the *taike* appellation as a mark of pride. Indeed, MC Hotdog and Chang Chen-yue's song praising the splendor of the *taimei* is ultimately just as much about celebrating the *taike* that accompanies her on her nights out to various "shady places" and pleads to share her pillow. Whereas the term *taike* once carried the stigma of class-, language-, and ethnicity-based discrimination, MC Hotdog and Chang join a growing chorus of voices calling to re-envision the identity in a

[157] Ibid. 63-64.

[158] Ibid., 64.

[159] Negus, "Narrative, Interpretation, Popular Song," 373.

more positive light. In "I Love Taiwan Girls," they offer up as a strategy re-imagining the *taike* as a kind of mack, a man of sexual dynamism, with confidence, charisma, and cash to spare.

In both "Korean Wave Invasion" and "I Love Taiwan Girls," MC Hotdog and his collaborators tell stories that reflect and reflect on their experiences of being young men at the beginning of the twenty-first century in Taiwan. In the former, they explore their dissatisfaction with prevailing models of masculinity in the music industry that exclude from participation men who do not show the requisite "effeminate masculinity" and who refuse to perform sentimental love songs. In the latter, they recast the previously maligned and denigrated figure of the *taike* as a man of power and means. As the economic landscape continues to shift and social roles for men and women continue to change, these rappers have made it their project to play with and test out re-imaginings of Taiwan masculinity. These visions may entail a significant degree of misogyny, whether vicious as in "Korean Wave Invasion" or humorous as in "I Love Taiwan Girls." As I have argued, however, it is perhaps less productive to read these narratives as prescriptions for male-female relationships than it is to consider the ways in which they position the male performer within broader power structures. A sense of economic exclusion and powerlessness drives the lyrical violence and violations of "Korean Wave Invasion," and "I Love Taiwan Girls" proposes a playful and ultimately celebratory updating of both male and female gender performance within the *taike* and *taimei* identity. Divergent as they are in tone and topic, these songs have in common a concern with male self-empowerment and a desire to persuade rap's largely male audience to challenge those in positions of power or who stand in judgment of others—be they music industry

executives or those who hold prejudicial views about ethnic identity and socioeconomic status.

STORIES ABOUT THE VICISSITUDES OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Danny Wang, the proprietor of Rhymewave and a longtime participant in Taiwan's rap scene, explained to me in an interview that, from his perspective, the principal distinctions between rap and traditional narrative genres like *shulaibao* lie not only in their sound, but also in the intimacy, immediacy, and more solemn tone of their storytelling: "*Shulaibao* is old, ancient, casual performance, but it's mostly funny stuff and it doesn't involve a lot of personal information or thoughts. But I think rap is quite personal."[160] Many performers to whom I spoke echoed this sentiment, describing how the music invites them to express their personal views on an array of subjects, even those that have historically been considered taboo. Speaking about the kinds of stories he tells through his music, Dog G offered:

> I'm not like other singers who are afraid of talking about politics, always hiding from politics. I write about everything—I'll write about how I'm going to party, I'll write about love between men and women, of course I will. Politics are also a part of my life, so of course I'm going to write about them…Sometimes it's intentional, but sometimes I don't give it much thought, just kind of speak off the cuff, because I think I should talk about the things I want to talk about.[161]

Dog G suggests that, for him, rap serves as a vessel for views on anything and everything, from romantic love to leisure to political matters—whatever's a "part of [his] life."

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[160] Danny Wang 王韋翔, personal interview, 8 March 2010.

[161] Dog G 大支, personal interview, 26 September 2010.

Although much of his work comments on social issues and he has certainly acquired a reputation as Taiwan rap's most outspoken artist on politics, Dog G insisted to me that he has no specific agenda—his music is simply a response to what he sees around him every day.

The notion of rap as a venue for personal stories about the vicissitudes of everyday life has a long history in Taiwan, beginning with Blacklist Workshop's social realist watershed *Songs of Madness*, which took as its focus the day-to-day experiences of often-overlooked figures in contemporary Taiwan, including taxi drivers, policemen, prostitutes, farmers, and businessmen. MC Hotdog first made an impact on the underground scene with pieces like 2001's "My Life" (*Wode Shenghuo* 我的生活), "Eighteen Years Old" (*Shiba Sui* 十八歲), and "Graduation" (*Biye* 畢業), all of which focused on the everyday challenges associated with growing up in urban Taiwan. Although the practice of writing about quotidian trials and tribulations has precedents and parallels in American rap—take, for example, Grandmaster Flash's "The Message" (1982), Arrested Development's "People Everyday" (1992), and The Notorious B.I.G.'s "Everyday Struggle" (1994)[162]—the stories Taiwan's rappers tell have a distinctly local flavor. In place of tales of gang violence or urban warfare—phenomena that are, overall, rather rare on the island—Taiwan's MCs give accounts of their triumphs and failures in the educational system, feelings of homesickness encountered as a consequence of migration to urban centers for work, and dalliances with the opposite sex, among other

[162] Grandmaster Flash, "The Message," *The Message*, Sugar Hill, 1982, LP; Arrested Development, "People Everyday," *3 Years, 5 Months & 2 Days in the Life Of…*, Cooltempo, 1992, compact disc; The Notorious B.I.G., "Everyday Struggle," *Ready to Die*, Bad Boy, 1994, compact disc.

things. Struggles with authority figures constitute another major theme of their compositions, a trait that lends what I am calling "Stories About the Vicissitudes of Everyday Life" continuity with both the previously discussed "Stories About History" and "Stories About Gender and Sexuality."

Rapper RPG spoke at length about the ways in which his music responds to his daily life and surroundings, especially his experiences of academic and workplace politics. His 2010 song "I Am Insane" describes the frustrations he has experienced as an office worker in Taipei, where he struggles to make ends meet in spite of having a degree from a competitive university and juggling several jobs at once.[163] His experiences are reflected in the current statistics about living and working on the island: as noted earlier, Taiwanese employees log approximately 2,200 hours annually,[164] but inflation has far outpaced growth of salaries—between 1997 and 2012, the hourly minimum wage only increased from NT$66 to NT$103 (a difference of approximately US$1)[165] in spite of a 16.35% rise in the consumer price index over the same period.[166] The song is a direct response to government officials who have chastised the younger generation's apparent

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[163] RPG, "Wo shi shenjingbing" 我是神經病 [I am insane], 2010, music and lyrics archived online, accessed March 8, 2013, http://tw.streetvoice.com/music/Rapguy/song/109804/.

[164] Cindy Sui, "Deaths Spotlight Taiwan's 'Overwork' Culture," *BBC News Asia*, March 19, 2012, accessed March 5, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16834258. Taiwan's Council of Labor Affairs keeps and makes public a range of statistics regarding employment on the island. See http://www.cla.gov.tw/.

[165] "Table 1-1 Major Labor and Economic Indicator," Council of Labor Affairs, last modified January 2013, http://statdb.cla.gov.tw/html/mon/c1010.htm.

[166] "Consumer Price Indices," Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting, and Statistics, Executive Yuan, R.O.C. (Taiwan), last modified February 2013, http://www.dgbas.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=12092&ctNode=1558.

preference for remaining unmarried and childless in this economic climate. In particular, RPG targets former Health Minister Yaung Chih-liang (*Yang Zhiliang* 楊志良), who angered the island's youth when he made public statements implying a connection between single lifestyles and mental illness.[167] RPG explained to me his view that "the reason young people don't get married is because the wages are too low. Most people our age are responsible for our own life, and our elders…But the wage right now is too low. What the hell—[how am I] going to marry and have children?"[168] Below are the complete Mandarin lyrics to "I Am Insane," accompanied by an English translation:

(RPG's voice, spoken:) 這首歌送給我們的衛生署長，楊志良先生

我是神經病!

因為我單身的該死 我單身的該死
我單身的該死 我單身的該死
我單身的該死 我單身的該死
我單身的該死 我單身的該死

(spoken:) 從今以後不要叫我RPG 叫我神經病 謝謝!

這是偉大的政府 全新的力作
官員腦袋運作 結論我腦袋有洞
我想我真的有病 這絕對沒有錯
長這麼大 真的很沒有用
我沒有錢結婚更不用說養小孩了
女人要穩定可是靠我就垮台了

[167] Wang Changmin 王昶閔, "Danshen yi de jingshenbing Yang Zhiliang kuaizui you chuanghuo" 單身易得精神病 楊志良快嘴又闖禍 [Singles more likely to become mentally ill, Yaung Chih-liang blunders again], *Ziyou dianzibao* 自由電子報 [Liberty Times Online], April 8, 2010, accessed March 10, 2013, http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2010/new/apr/8/today-life6.htm.

[168] RPG, personal interview, 21 June 2011.

所以決定努力工作為了未來振作
為了得到尊重 更好的生活
領著微薄的薪水然後工時超長
做不好的時候尊嚴被嚴重的踐踏
大家叫我草莓 我怎麼敢反抗?
因為我菜嘛 不然又能怎樣?
不合理的要求 這叫做磨練
所以加班到半夜當然沒有加班費
在這誠摯邀請各位政府的官員
下班後到企業看看燈有沒有滅

(two men's voices, spoken:)
1: 你跟你女朋友在一起這麼久， 有沒有要結婚啊?
2: 怎麼可能？ 我都在加班都要分手了啦!

我沒有錢我怎麼敢生
羊窒糧他叫我不要單身 快點結婚
不然健保費多繳的時候我別想抽身
因為我單身的該死 (man's voice:) 你單身的該死
(woman's voice:) 我單身的該死 (man's voice:) 你單身的該死
(RPG's voice:) 我單身的該死 (man's voice:) 你單身的該死
(woman's voice:) 我單身的該死 (woman's voice:) 你單身的該死
(RPG, laughing:) 我是神經病!

先求有再求好所以領22K
理所當然非常肚爛亡茹懸
我不敢反抗 因為我有病
血尿剛好而已哪敢爭取什麼福利
說加班就加班 說銷假就銷假
我怕我一說話隔天就準備回家
被鬥臭的階層 被深掘的軟土
被凹爆的肝臟 被利用的白老鼠
要正常休假 我是神經病
我要求加班費用我是神經病
我買不起房子 我是神經病
我不敢成立家庭我是神經病
我對不起爸爸 我對不起媽媽
我對不起公司 我對不起師長
我對不起社會 我對不起國家

(RPG's voice, spoken:) 楊署長不好意思，我不應該被生下來
(recording of Yaung Chih-liang's voice:) 大家對神經病這三個字有很高的銘感度呵－的敏感度呵－的敏感度呵

我沒有錢我怎麼敢生
羊窒糧他叫我不要單身 快點結婚
不然健保費多繳的時候我別想抽身
因為我單身的該死 (man's voice:) 你單身的該死
(woman's voice:) 他單身的該死 (man's voice:) 她也單身的該死
(RPG's voice:) 我單身的該死 (man's voice:) 你單身的該死
(woman's voice:) 他單身的該死 (man's voice:) 她也單身的該死
(RPG's voice:) 從今以後沒結婚的都不叫單身了
我們是神經病!

*　　*　　*

(RPG's voice, spoken:) *This song is for our Health Minister, Mr. Yaung Chih-liang.*

because I'm single I should go to hell, I'm single I should go to hell
I'm single I should go to hell, I'm single I should go to hell
I'm single I should go to hell, I'm single I should go to hell
I'm single I should go to hell, I'm single I should go to hell

(spoken:) *From now on do not call me RPG, call me Insane. Thank you!*

this is our great government's newest stroke of genius
our officials wracked their brains: the conclusion is my brain is full of holes
I think I must really be sick, that must be right
I'm so grown up, but it's really no use
I don't have money to marry, let alone raise kids
women who want stability can only depend on me to collapse
I decided to work hard, labor for my future
to gain respect, a better life
earning a meager salary and working very long hours
when I fail my dignity takes a serious beating
everyone calls me Strawberry, but how do I dare argue
because I'm green, what else can I do
unreasonable demands, that's what they call training
working overtime until the middle of the night, of course that doesn't mean overtime pay
we sincerely invite you government officials
to go to the corporations after you leave the office and look at whether the lights are extinguished

(two men's voices, spoken:)

1: *You've been with your girlfriend a long time. You getting married?*
2: *How? I'm always working overtime, we're always breaking up!*

I have no money, how am I supposed to live
"Sheep Constipated With Grain" tells me I shouldn't be single, hurry up and get married
if NHI raises their rates, I won't be able to escape
because I'm single I should go to hell, (man's voice:) *I'm single I should go to hell*
(woman's voice:) *I'm single I should go to hell,* (man's voice:) *I'm single I should go to hell*
(RPG's voice:) *I'm single I should go to hell,* (man's voice:) *I'm single I should go to hell*
(woman's voice:) *I'm single I should go to hell,* (woman's voice:) *I'm single I should go to hell*
(RPG, laughing) *I am insane!*

first beg then beg again, make 22K
it goes without saying, I'm pissed at "Hanging Stench of Death"
I dare not resist, because I'm sick
just because I'm pissing blood doesn't mean I should dare receive your charity
say work overtime, then work overtime, say take leave, then take leave
I fear that if I say something, the next day I'll have to pack my things and leave
a social class attacked and maligned, soft soil dug to the very bottom
a liver worked to bursting, a white mouse deeply used
want to take a normal vacation, I am insane
I demand overtime pay, I am insane
I can't afford a home, I am insane
I can't have a family, I am insane
I'm sorry dad, I'm sorry mom
I'm sorry company, I'm sorry teachers
I'm sorry society, I'm sorry country

(RPG's voice, spoken:) *Excuse me Minister Yaung, I never should have been born.*
(recording of Yaung Chih-liang's voice:) *Towards the term "mental illness," everyone is extremely sensitive, sensitive, sensitive…*

I have no money, how am I supposed to live
"Sheep Obstructing Grain" tells me I shouldn't be single, hurry up and get married
if NHI raises their rates, I won't be able to escape
because I'm single I should go to hell, (man's voice:) *you're single you should go to hell*
(woman's voice:) *he's single he should go to hell,* (man's voice:) *she's single she should go to hell*
(RPG's voice:) *I'm single I should go to hell,* (man's voice:) *you're single should go to hell*
(woman's voice:) *he's single he should go to hell,* (man's voice:) *she's single she should go to hell*
(RPG's voice:) *from now on the unmarried shall not be called single*
we are insane!

The lyrics to "I Am Insane" suggest that the high cost of living on the island is both financial and psychological. RPG opens with a spoken dedication to Yaung Chih-liang, immediately positioning the song as a response to the Health Minister's controversial comments. He then launches into the first statement of the chorus, eight times repeating the phrase "Because I'm single I should go to hell" in a dull and listless voice before politely requesting that the listener cease referring to him by his MC name and instead, per the Minister, simply call him "insane." In the first verse, RPG raps about trying to set himself up for a comfortable future, but finding his efforts thwarted as he labors overtime for insufficient pay and suffers the verbal abuse of his superiors. The justification for such treatment is that he is "green" (*cai* 菜, Mandarin slang, lit. "a vegetable"), an inexperienced, immature junior colleague with little power or status in the workplace. Implying that government officials are out of touch with the demands being placed on young workers, RPG invites them to observe that the lights remain on and employees at work in most office buildings even after bureaucrats clock out of their comfortable government jobs. The rapper speaks from his perspective as a young man, and he experiences the criticisms of both his elder colleagues and bureaucrats as a threat to his manhood. He remarks that others call him a "Strawberry" (*caomei* 草莓), a term with distinct gendered overtones that references membership in the so-called "Strawberry Tribe" (*caomei zu* 草莓族). Political scientist Shelley Rigger has noted that to be called a Strawberry is "an insult, especially for Taiwanese in their 20s, because in the eyes of many Taiwanese over forty, young people are, like the fruit, beautiful to look at, but

easily damaged—and quick to rot."[169] Although different sources define the parameters for membership in the Strawberry Tribe in varying ways, there is a general consensus that Strawberries, who are too young to have experienced the trials of life under martial law, are allergic to hard work, over-educated, and self-centered.[170] As Rigger puts it, "The logic behind the Strawberry Tribe discourse holds that Taiwanese born after 1970, and especially those born in the 1980s, have known only wealth and comfort. Their indulgent parents—seeking to spare them the privations of their own childhoods—showered them with material things and shielded them from hard work. The result is a generation of youth who are not only immature and materialistic, but also take Taiwan's freedom and prosperity for granted."[171] An active member of the male-dominated rap community who works several jobs to make ends meet, RPG is predisposed to discomfort with accusations of softness and sweetness, not to mention apathy. To be called a Strawberry stings, and "I Am Insane" registers reasoned objection to the use of an epithet that obscures the social and economic challenges that today's youth have been charged with negotiating.

Prior to the second repetition of the chorus, two other voices join RPG's for a brief spoken interlude. The first speaker inquires as to whether the second speaker is planning to marry his long-term girlfriend, to which the second speaker replies that his constant need to work overtime has forced them to separate. RPG returns to rap the next

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[169] Shelley Rigger, "Strawberry Jam: National Identity, Cross-Strait Relations, and Taiwan's Youth," in *The Changing Dynamics of the Relations Among China, Taiwan, and the United States*, ed. Cal Clark (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 81.

[170] Ibid., 83.

[171] Ibid.

three lines, asking how he can possibly sustain himself on his current meager earnings. He complains that an unsympathetic Health Minister Yaung—whose name is rendered in the lyrics RPG has posted online using the characters for "sheep" (*yang* 羊), "constipated" (*zhi* 窒), and "grain" (*liang* 糧), which pun with the more flattering characters of his actual name, "poplar" (*yang* 楊), "aspiring" (*zhi* 志), and "goodness" (*liang* 良)—has asked him, despite RPG's perilous financial situation, to find a woman and hurry to the altar. The rapper laments further that if the National Health Insurance Bureau (NHI) raises their rates on unmarried subscribers, he'll have no choice by law but to pay, in spite of already being strapped for cash. This is another direct reference to Yaung, who advocated for charging single individuals higher insurance rates because, he alleged, they were more likely to be mentally ill and therefore rely to a greater extent on the healthcare system.[172] When the second repetition of the chorus arrives, RPG is joined by several additional male and female voices, all repeating with increasing fervor the maxim that they ought to go to hell because they're single. The chorus ends with the sound of RPG laughing maniacally before once again declaring his own insanity.

In the second verse, the rapper describes how he is forced to prostrate himself to his employers, if only for the privilege of earning a pitifully low salary. For this, he directs blame toward the policies of the Council of Labor Affairs, led at the time the song was written by Minister Wang Ruxuan (王如玄), whose name is rendered in the lyrics RPG has posted online using the characters for "death" (*wang* 亡), "rotting stench" (*ru* 茹), and "hanging" (*xuan* 懸), which pun with the more flattering characters of her actual

[172] Wang Changmin 王昶閔, "Danshen yi de jingshenbing."

name, "king" (*wang* 王), "as" or "into the state of" (*ru* 如), and "mystical" (*xuan* 玄). RPG might be "pissing blood," but he remains willing to exert immense effort and take whatever measures are necessary in order to avoid being fired—a circumstance that, indeed, makes him question his own sanity. Invoking terminology that suggests Marxian notions of class struggle and comparing himself to a series of worn-out, exploited things (over-tilled soil, a burst liver, a white lab rat), he laments his inability to take a vacation, afford a home, or have a family. For his "failures" he sarcastically claims remorse and proceeds to issue facetious apologies that suggest an exaggerated sense of filial piety and Confucian obligation to various authority figures, to society, and to the nation at large. A melodramatic spoken interlude follows, with RPG apologizing to Health Minister Yaung for having ever been born, to which a sample of Yaung's voice responds with a half-hearted apology that he never should have used the word "insane" because mental illness is a sensitive issue.[173] A final statement of the chorus concludes the song; RPG is once again joined by additional male and female voices, claiming this time that they as a community deserve punishment for the crime of being unmarried.

"I Am Insane" clearly echoes Jutoupi and Blacklist Workshop's madness-themed pieces from an earlier era, which themselves addressed the political issues and social problems of their times. RPG claims, however, that this song was inspired more significantly by American rapper Nas' 1999 "I Want to Talk to You," which decries the

[173] "Taiwanese Minister Sorry For Linking Singles to Mental Illness," *Telegraph*, April 8, 2010, accessed March 10, 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/expatnews/7566940/Taiwanese-minister-sorry-for-linking-singles-to-mental-illness.html.

U.S. government's inability or unwillingness to address the plight of the urban poor.[174] Traces of Nas are evident in the directness of RPG's lyrics as he addresses the government in general and Health Minister Yaung in particular, but the two artists do not otherwise sound much alike. Nas's vocals on "I Want to Talk to You" provide a prime example of speech-effusive flow and, moreover, demonstrate a virtuosic rhythmic flexibility with respect to the underlying beat, diverging from and returning to it fluidly. The result is a declamatory yet naturalistic style resembling oratory that augments the forcefulness of his angry message. RPG, on the other hand, takes a different approach to expressing his anger, adopting a predominantly sung rhythmic flow with strict adherence to the underlying beat. In the setting of his vituperative lyrics, this flow style produces a striking effect: he seems to use the confines of the meter to hold his seething rage in check; a clipped, precise delivery gives the performance a sardonic tone, much like his interjected laughter and self-lacerating lyrical content.

While Nas provides thematic inspiration for RPG, a more aurally evident intertextual reference is present in the song's accompaniment: RPG uses the looped vocals, bass, and percussion track from Jay-Z's 2009 song "On To the Next One," material that producer Swizz Beatz in turn drew from French electro-house duo Justice's 2007 song "D.A.N.C.E."[175] As previously noted, RPG explicitly downplayed this artistic choice during our interview, explaining that he had picked out the music quickly in order to record and release the song online as a timely response to the health minister's public comments. Nevertheless, the accompaniment places "I Am Insane," a song decrying the

[174] RPG, personal interview.

[175] Jay-Z, "On to the Next One," *The Blueprint 3*, Roc Nation/Atlantic Records, 2009, compact disc; Justice, "D.A.N.C.E.," *Cross*, Ed Banger Records, 2007, compact disc.

problems of social immobility and career stagnation in Taiwan, in scathing dialogue with "On To the Next One," in which Jay-Z celebrates his rise from poverty to fabulous wealth and boasts of the senses of forward momentum and progress that propel his work. A thundering bass and militant snare and hi-hat lend unexpected gravity and urgency to a song ostensibly about the quotidian struggles of meeting expectations in the office and sustaining meaningful relationships with partners and spouses. These instrumental sounds might be interpreted as incongruous with the mundane subject matter and therefore sardonic, but as I have discussed, the problems RPG describes have very real and ominous consequences for the future of Taiwan's rapidly greying population.

The use of additional voices other than RPG's also marks "I Am Insane," suggesting that the recording is envisioned as a statement on behalf of all young people in Taiwan. The Jay-Z instrumental includes a chopped-up fragment of the sung, layered vocals in "D.A.N.C.E."—a chorus of childlike voices singing a fragment of the cryptic phrase "Under the spotlight, neither black nor white, it doesn't matter…"—which sounds again and again behind RPG's vocals throughout "I Am Insane." The lyrics to the original are unintelligible, but it produces the effect of a crowd chanting its support, perhaps simulating the legions of similarly disenchanted young professionals for whom he might speak. Some of these individual voices appear in the chorus, where male and female speakers take turns repeating the line, "I'm single I should go to hell," in one case rising to a hysterical scream. The inclusion of both sexes among these voices is notable as the structural problems that RPG describes affect not just young men like him but also women. Gender inequalities notwithstanding, both men and women participate in the workforce and in the raising of families. Women are present on the track not as lust

objects but rather as fellow protestors, differentiating the gender politics of "I Am Insane" from those of, for instance, MC Hotdog's "I Love Taiwan Girls."

What "I Am Insane" does have in common with "I Love Taiwan Girls" is the intercontextual nature of its narrative. RPG does not tell a story in the sense that Chatman describes—there is an "existent" in the figure of RPG himself, but no real "events" to speak of and no discernible traversal of time. Per Negus' understanding of popular songs as narrative by virtue of their intercontextuality, however, "I Am Insane" could be said to "participate in the wider cultural dialogues through which historical understanding is narrated."[176] Indeed, as Health Minister Yaung went on record decrying the youth of Taiwan for their apparent inclination to remain single, "I Am Insane" registers in a very public way RPG's strong disagreement with the Minister's comments. In both its sonic and literary dimensions, the song constitutes a trenchant narrative about workplace politics and the vicissitudes of everyday life in Taiwan, one that in turn contributes to a larger conversation about the fate of the nation should the marriage and birth rates fall even lower.

Although RPG's account of his struggle to remain financially solvent and make a life for himself in Taipei stems directly from his personal experiences as an office worker, he makes it abundantly clear that he tells his story on behalf of numerous other young men and women negotiating similarly unfavorable economic circumstances. Many artists writing about everyday life, however, prefer to engage more intimate, more specifically contextual narratives. The works of RPG's sometimes-collaborator Soft Lipa, for example, concern themselves chiefly with describing quotidian tasks, environments, and

[176] Negus, "Narrative, Interpretation, Popular Song," 368.

emotional states. His "Persistent Worries of a Teenager" (*Shaonian weichizhe fannao* 少年維持著煩惱) tells the story of a young man attempting to navigate the transition from childhood to adulthood, making mundane decisions about trivial matters—from what color shoes to wear to how to cut his hair—while also contemplating weightier questions about the meaning of life and love.[177] Likewise, in songs like "Life Goes On" (*Shengming yao jixu* 生命要繼續) and "The Prodigal Son" (*Langzi huitou* 浪子回頭), Witness describes his personal experiences with relationship failures, the suicide of a former flame, and substance abuse.[178]

What, then, might we say is the unifying theme of this repertoire? Returning to Dog G's statement at the beginning of this section about his music as a venue for commentary on anything and everything ("I think I should talk about the things I want to talk about.") and considering the diverse examples I have discussed, it would seem that the notion of "Stories About the Vicissitudes of Everyday Life" is not particularly content-specific. Additionally, these stories are not categorically divorced from either "Stories About History" or "Stories About Gender and Sexuality" insofar as history or experiences of gender and sexuality impinge on the personal accounts that rappers give. What these stories do have in common is their documentary impulse, their aspirations toward social realism, and their desire to capture emotional responses to the here and now. Moreover, as the example of "I Am Insane" suggests, this category of narrative displays a

[177] Soft Lipa 蛋堡, "Shaonian weichizhe fannao" 少年維持著煩惱 [Persistent worries of a teenager], *Winter Sweet*, Kao!, 2009, compact disc.

[178] Witness 黃崇旭, "Shengming yao jixu" 生命要繼續 [Life goes on], *Huang Chongxu* 黃崇旭 [Witness], Rock Records, 2005, compact disc. "Langzi huitou" 浪子回頭 [The prodigal son] has yet to appear on an album, but the music video, uploaded January 28, 2013, is available on Youtube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqyJ1Ru8loM.

keen and explicit awareness of generational identity vis-à-vis the unique challenges of *this* historical moment as well as the more universal struggles that attend the daily experience—or inexperience—of youth.

* * *

In this second half of Part Three, I have explored the stories Taiwan's rappers tell in terms of three broad categories of narrative that encompass a wide variety of musical materials. I engaged in close readings of several pieces—"Civil Revolt, Part 1," "Korean Wave Invasion," "I Love Taiwan Girls," and "I Am Insane"—and made more superficial reference to a number of others, analyzing them in terms of the criteria I laid out in the first half of Part Three. These compositions differ markedly from one another in their lyrical subjects, musical sounds, languages deployed, and in the larger intercontextual narratives they engage. Taken together, however, I argue that they demonstrate a clear desire on the part of Taiwan's rappers to wrestle with and make sense of the world they see around them through storytelling. Kou Chou Ching and Chang Jui-chuan's performances in "Civil Revolt, Part 1" reflect an impulse to contribute to the disclosure, and perhaps formation, of new narratives about the island's past. They attempt to make known stories of Hoklo and Hakka revolt against Qing rule, long buried beneath colonial "narratives of Taiwan's unfolding" that emphasized the island's historical ties to Japan and China. MC Hotdog, Dog G, and MC 168's "Korean Wave Invasion" rails against the constrictive models of "effeminate masculinity" that prevail in Mandopop, effectively excluding rappers from participation in mainstream music; and MC Hotdog and Chang Chen-yue's "I Love Taiwan Girls" attempts to re-imagine the denigrated *taike* identity in terms of the more cosmopolitan, authoritative, sexually powerful mack figure of African

American fiction and poetry. Both of those pieces engage larger narratives about male gender identity and sexuality in the wake of major socioeconomic changes on the island that have altered the terrain on which pathways from boyhood to manhood have traditionally been constructed. In "I Am Insane," RPG tells a comparatively personal story about the frustrations he has encountered as a lowly office-worker in Taipei, mistreated by his superiors and unable to support himself on his meager salary. He expresses intense anger at the words of Health Minister Yaung Chih-liang, who chastised the island's youth for their apparent unwillingness to marry and establish their own families, and suggested the instantiation of higher National Health Insurance rates because single people were, according to him, more likely to be mentally ill. "I Am Insane" manifests a drive to wrest control of the narrative about the indolence of the so-called Strawberry Tribe away from authority figures, and to make known through the public activity of performance the private grievances of youth. Musical and literary texts converge differently in these diverse rap stories, sometimes directly illustrating narrative actions through text painting and sometimes making more oblique intertextual references through sampling and interpolation. In all cases, however, they are imbued with strong senses of purpose—the feeling that, in Chang Jui-chuan's words, their authors have a message.

Postscript

The Story Goes On

A few minutes after lift-off, the plane transporting me away from Taiwan and back to the United States tilted, permitting a sunlit view of the northern part of the island through the small portal of the double-paned window. Highways cut through emerald wooded areas studded with the gray geometry of industrial development. As clouds began to obscure my view in bursts of white, I imagined life continuing in the places and for the people I had come to know, and I wondered whether Danny Wang was at that moment preparing to open his jewel box of a record shop in Ximending, whether Dog G was planning another benefit concert in the open lot in Tainan, whether Dadi was laying down a new track. I had become deeply invested in the community over eighteen months of fieldwork and hoped to remain connected to the scene from thousands of miles away, a sustained witness to the kinds of major and minor metamorphoses that inevitably accompany the passage of time.

Artists have been telling tales about Taiwan, and about their own lives, since the end of martial law in 1987; the robustness of the scene and passion of community members described throughout this dissertation suggest that this project will proceed in the years ahead. But as time marches on and the martial law period fades from living memory, and young people who have only ever experienced Taiwan as a democratic society become dominant voices in the community, I wonder about the particular ways in which Taiwan rap will transform: How will it sound as music for sociopolitical engagement? What causes—and there are many from which to choose—will the

community champion? Will rap become primarily a vehicle for more personal narratives? Will it retain its present linguistic diversity and sonic variety? Greek philosopher Heraclitus famously remarked that the only constant in the universe is change. This maxim would seem to have the ring of truth as far as Taiwan rap is concerned: the music has undergone numerous transformations over the years, as the strident political narratives of Blacklist Workshop have given way to the bubblegum pop-rap of the LA Boyz and, in turn, the gentle poetic meditations of Soft Lipa. Given this history, it seems only reasonable to expect yet further change as time passes.

Whatever forms Taiwan rap might take in the future, I expect only that the music will continue to summon performers and listeners to a sense of empathy. The diverse artists whose works I have explored in this dissertation have in common, if nothing else, this impulse: to forge connections between their own life experiences and those of their listeners. Soft Lipa describes this desire succinctly in his 2009 song "Hit the Rhyme."[1] Extolling the limitless possibilities of rap as a creative form, he challenges artists to capture and make palpable for audiences the full spectrum of human emotion:

我先聲明一點 不用艱深的字眼 文字一樣源源不絕彷彿天生活字典
這是我目標 我想要走的路 為了押韻能打開想像力的窗戶
可以談天說地 像一群朋友睡在通鋪 可以單刀直入 無拘束
用最通俗的講法表達豐富的想法 所有痛苦和快樂都讓你像親身經歷

let me say without need for difficult words, letters stream forth all the same, the dictionary of life
this is my goal, the road I want to walk, rhyming opens the windows of the imagination
you can shoot the breeze like friends sharing a dorm room, strike at the heart of the matter, unrestrained
use the simplest language to express the richest thoughts, experience another's pain and pleasure as though it were your own

[1] Soft Lipa 蛋堡, "Hit the Rhyme," *Shou lianshui* 收斂水 [Lotion], Kao!, 2009, compact disc.

Delivered over a gentle jazz piano riff, "Hit the Rhyme" celebrates the intimate emotional and intellectual communication that rap invites. Soft Lipa emphasizes that the words artists deploy need not be overly complicated, that rap is most powerful when performers use language that is direct and unfettered, when they apply their efforts to keeping it real. In so doing, he suggests, artists can "open the windows of the imagination" and conjure "another's pain and pleasure" for a potentially transformative experience.

As the island receded into the distance and I wrote up my research over the course of the next two years, I continued to watch through the virtual window of the Internet as the lives of rap community members underwent their own transformations. Ill Mo posted images to Facebook of his daughter Molly at the zoo, and then of a second daughter, Mona, wrapped tightly in bunting shortly after her birth. Jutoupi emailed pictures from his performances with his Christian rock band and links to news stories he thought worthy of attention. Dog G used PTT and the Kung Fu Entertainment blog to announce the release of his second full-length album, and then YouTube to host a long and steady stream of new music videos, one of which featured footage of his visit to meet the Dalai Lama. Fan Chiang tweeted his calls to join Taiwan's burgeoning anti-nuclear movement. Fish Lin communicated via Instant Messager that he had graduated from his Master's program, Chang Jui-chuan that he had made the difficult decision to leave academia for a job as a professional editor, and RPG that he had acquired yet additional employment. Just a few days prior to my composing this conclusion, Shortee announced his engagement to be married by uploading an image from his cellphone of the reservation agreement for his wedding banquet at a Taipei hotel. As I immersed myself in writing about the struggles of community members to navigate the path from childhood and to

become self-supporting adults, I could discern that life was proceeding apace for them. Their stories, inscribed in online space, were going on.

Appendix A

Core Interview Questions

1. Please talk a little bit about your background. (e.g. Where were you born? Where did you grow up? What kind of work do your parents do? Do you have siblings? Are you religious?)

2. Where did you go to high school? Did you attend university?

3. When did you decide to become a musician? How did your career begin?

4. When did you first hear rap? Can you describe the experience?

5. What kind of music do you like to listen to?

6. Who are your favorite local artists? Who are your favorite foreign artists?

7. What are the origins of Taiwan rap? Can you tell me about its history?

8. What do you think makes for "good" or "successful" rap?

9. What kind of audience does rap have in Taiwan right now? Do you think there's a market for rap here?

10. Are you able to support yourself financially with your music?

11. Do you use the Internet to learn about new music? To distribute your own music?

12. Your music is mostly in [language]. Do you ever rap in [other language]? Why or why not?

13. Can you describe for me how you create your music? What is your process?

14. How do you think music and politics are related in Taiwan? Do you use your music to talk about politics?

15. What do you feel is the most significant song you've written? Why? What is your favorite song you've written? Why?

16. Can you talk a little bit about your past and current creative partnerships? What is it like working with [person]? How about with [person]?

17. What are your hopes for your career in the future?

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