

Youth and Political Music in Taiwan: Resignifying the Nation at Inland Rock and Tshingsan Fest

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Abstract

This article uses musical events in Taiwan to examine the changing contestation of Taiwanese politics. It shows how youth activists remake political practices by connecting people to constructions of local culture through musical performances. Whereas civil society and youth participation in Taiwan's elections have attracted increased scholarly attention, this article focuses on politically charged activities outside election campaigns. The article sources politics in musical practices, highlighting localized reproductions of global genres of popular music and its significance for Taiwanese youth activism. Drawing on historical analyses of the development of Taiwanese music throughout the twentieth century as localizing global influences in the production of indigenized music, the author argues that music has been more than just a communicative medium for contesting establishment politics, because activists use it to resignify sociocultural symbols and practices in productions of Taiwanese identity. The author examines two 2016 music festivals, Inland Rock and Tshingsan Fest, to analyze active constructions of identity and political action through a framework of music as politics. It demonstrates how, by appropriating space and symbols of Nantou County and Monga district for new cultural festivities, activists reterritorialized physical and conceptual terrain to reconnect people to indigenized constructions of Taiwanese identities.

Keywords: Taiwan, popular music, politics, youth, identity, activism, music festival, resignification, indigeneity

Introduction

Scholars writing about the politics of Taiwan have tended to focus on relations and electoral trends across the Taiwan Strait. The 2000, 2008, and 2016 elections of Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and Kuomintang (KMT) governments were lauded as milestones in Taiwan's successful democratization, confirming the transition away from authoritarian rule and reinforcing an ideological contrast to the People's Republic of China (PRC). In 2014, the Sunflower Student movement and the election of independent candidate Ko Wen-je 柯文哲 as the mayor of Taipei also captured headlines, with observers citing evidence indicative of a major turning point in Taiwan's politics. In this new democratic Taiwan, the KMT can lose long-held "iron blue ticket" parliamentary seats along with a legislative majority, and activists

are allowed to register parties advocating radical unification and independence positions. According to many pundits, the crest of this recent transformative wave was youth engagement. Youth power (*nianqing lilian* 年輕力量) occupied parliament and won media attention, forcing the Legislative Yuan to suspend the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement. In 2016, youth power further swept the DPP into executive and legislative power for the first time, with Tsai Ing-wen as its president.

One of the more obvious manifestations of Taiwan's youth power in politics was the emergence of the third force in the 2016 elections. The label referred to a loose coalition of minor parties and independent candidates not officially aligned with the DPP or KMT in contesting the legislature. These groups supposedly indicated a break from established KMT and DPP-dominated "blue-green politics," representing youth disaffected by traditional politics but still politically engaged. Of these parties, only the New Power Party (*Shidai lilian* 時代力量, hereafter NPP) successfully contested the election, winning five seats. The NPP consistently captured media spotlights as the proclaimed representatives of youth power and the party promoted their activist roots, explicitly linking their formation to the Sunflower movement and other social movements. This article develops our understanding of this aspect of Taiwan's changing sociopolitical landscape by focusing on music and politics as practiced after NPP and DPP electoral success. Music has been an integral element of electoral mobilization for both the KMT and DPP, deployed variously as campaign songs, television advertisements, rally performances, and so on. Although the two 2016 musical festivals discussed in this article were neither campaign performances nor official party events, they nevertheless held significance for both the NPP and its core demographic, as well as for scholars of activist culture in Taiwan.

In this article, I argue that music was more than just a communicative medium for contesting establishment politics, because activists strove to resignify sociocultural symbols and practices in productions of authentic Taiwanese identities. I examine two musical events—Inland Rock (*Neidi yaogun* 內地搖滾) and Tshingsan Fest (*Qingshan ji* 青山祭)—as case studies of music as politics, wherein political practice was reformed beyond electoral party politics. Political practices here were dynamic, participatory processes enacted through semi-structured festivals. Although these festivals were not countercultural utopian fairs performing explicit ideals, they retained carnivalesque aspects. These were spaces in which organized interests cooperated to break down barriers segregating politics from everyday experiences, thereby remaking the sociocultural as political. Activists intended to invert the Republic of China (ROC) hegemonic order and, through localization, reconnect youths to traditional yet cosmopolitan Taiwanese culture. These festivals were therefore more than just musical or political occasions, and each was more than just as a vehicle for the other. Rather, the festivals themselves were political expressions reflexively producing readings of history and society as music, sound, and organization of peoples.

National identity is a common topic of discussion on the politics of Taiwan. The "long shadow of Taiwan's one-party legacy" (Mattlin 2011) still looms over democratic Taiwan, emerging in observances of the 228 Massacre of February 28,

1947, divisive debates on transitional justice, and contested reviews of history curricula. National identity is essentially presented as a convenient metric by which to measure the pulse of politics and predict the direction of society: the more youths identify as “Taiwanese” instead of “Chinese,” the more supportive they are of independence instead of unification, the more “green” the youth vote (Ihara 2017). At a more critical reading, mobilization of national identity delimits a positivist interpretation of identity and categorical “Taiwanese-ness” often justified with quantitative data. Identities—whether cast as national, Taiwanese, Chinese, or otherwise—are, of course, more complex and dynamic than this reductive framing. This article takes a qualitative approach to analyzing politics and identities in Taiwan, critically questioning the relationship between music and activism in youth culture to contribute to discussions of politics in Taiwan.

Social movements have an important position in Taiwan’s democratization and continue to influence politics in the post-authoritarian era. Historically, the rise of the antinuclear environmental movement played a key role in opening up political space for voices contributing to democratization, influencing the DPP to adopt an unequivocal antinuclear stance (Ho 2003, 685). The late Ma Ying-jeou era (2012–2016) culminated in the 2014 Sunflower movement and the KMT’s resounding electoral defeat (Fell 2017). Such movements have contributed to Taiwan’s diverse and flourishing civil society—itsself a highly contested concept in Taiwan studies (Weller 1999), reflected through characterizations of “ecumenical nationalism” (Madsen 2007, 139), “civic nationalism” (Cole 2015), and “ethnic nationalism” (Shen and Wu 2008), among others. Further, national identity and nationalisms in Taiwan operate in pluralist spheres touching marginalized and minority concerns—such as labor, aborigine, and gender and sexuality—, complicating narratives and conflicts of ideologies. Rather than wade into theoretical arguments on party-dependent movements, however, this article focuses on the role of music in shaping identities and ideological frameworks in youth activist cultures. If the politics of identity processes advocate to connect people to ideological cultures, then music holds an important but understudied position in forging and maintaining such cultures. This relationship between music and activist culture in Taiwan was evident in the post-2000 environmental movement (Ho 2014, 975) and, as I argue in this article, outside social movements as evident in music festivals held after the 2016 elections.

This article treats music as more than just a lyrical text joined with sound to constitute an independent meaning. Music can have power in daily life as social actors actively consume and critically engage with popular music in varying contexts (Kotarba et al. 2013). Musical texts, then, read through contextualized sensibilities, emerge from specific understandings to engage with discourse practices much as any other cultural text, because social actors convey and reproduce through music affect and meaning in new social and historical contexts. This perspective interprets people’s consumption and reproduction of music as contributing to collective and individual identities, and thereby as a significant force in political discourse (Taaffee 2004). This article understands music’s capacity to engage actors as a unique form for interpretation, because the combined sound and lyric components are neither solely experiential nor historical (Bennett 2000). If lyrics as political text can be transformed, through sound, to become music with political readings, then music

with political readings can be transformed, through political action, to become political music. This theorization of music provides for a rich set of research materials, as popular music and youth activism in Taiwan foster interaction between global and local forces facilitating heterogeneous voices and actions.

This article draws on fieldwork data including participant observation at both festival sites. Researchers aiming to illuminate the politics of political music are at risk of reducing the field of inquiry to lyrics as text and audiences as numbers. Participant observation allows for a deeper and more nuanced means of researching temporary sites of live musical performances. It facilitates participation as an audience member in the thick of the crowd, as well as providing the means to “step out” for active observation of both audience and performance. At the center of the crowd, the participant is subject to the emotive waves and movements of the audience as much as the performative power of the musicians on stage. When musicians are shouted down by their audiences, or when the crowd responds in ritualistic actions to a performer’s musical signals, the participant can be swept away in collective (e)motion. The participant is physically and emotionally exposed to the affective power of performance from dynamic positionality unavailable to the observer. The researcher as observer, however, perceives through a lens segregated from the agency of the crowd, positioned as a detached researcher describing and recording broader views of site activity. The flexibility and duality of participant-observer sensitivities can reveal complex performer-audience interactions that are especially important at popular, political music festivals wherein participants can embody political action in varying ways beyond just lyrics.

Complementing these “thick” inquiries through direct observation of the two live sites analyzed in this article were interviews with festival organizers, performers, and participants. Aside from being another avenue for access to fieldwork data, interviews provide additional context for interpretation of primary observation. Interpretation not contextualized with performer and audience perspectives risks flattening subjectivities and subsuming various experiences under the researcher’s own. Interviewees shared their perspectives through tailored semi-structured interviews in which specific questions were guided by a framework of themes. Interviewees were asked about their personal, musical, and political backgrounds and interests, as well as their engagements with the relevant music festival. The semi-structured interview allowed for flexibility in pursuing new topics or details raised by the participant, but remained centered on the interviewee’s relationship with music and politics. This format was crucial to exploring differences and interactions among organizer, performer, and audience. Interviewees were selected by significance and importance at the festivals—for example, headline acts, primary organizers, and hardcore fans. Aside from direct observations and semi-structured interviews, secondary materials such as third-party interviews and advertising materials also informed my analysis of the two festival experiences and filled gaps left by primary sources.

Before analyzing these observations and materials, however, it is necessary to first contextualize the social and musical histories informing the events by (1) reviewing the development of Taiwanese music through the martial law and democratization periods, highlighting the emergence of an indigenizing movement

striving to engage musically with social and political activism as means of advocating Taiwanese identity, and (2) building on this historical context by examining Inland Rock and Tshingsan Fest as specific sites of musical activism. In analyzing the two events, the article examines spaces, marketing, music, lyrics, and performances, thereby interpreting political music as a cultural form beyond the isolated interpretations of political texts. It theorizes these festivals as sites of musical practices constituting reflexive, interactive constructions of Taiwanese histories and cultures, thereby reproducing politics of identity.

Taiwanese Music

Throughout the twentieth century, music in Taiwan underwent nationalizing and internationalizing processes as part of a complex transition from authoritarianism into democracy. With the implementation of the KMT's martial-law governance, musical forms were regulated as artistic expressions serving national interests. In the midst of national crisis, cultural policy was intended to eliminate Japanese colonial legacy, weaken undesirable Taiwanese local traditions, and strengthen nationalist Chinese identity (Ho 2007, 466). In opposition to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Cultural Revolution in the PRC and to solidify the ROC in Taiwan, the KMT launched the Chinese Cultural Renaissance movement in 1966. As part of the movement, popular music was regulated by policies of sponsorship and surveillance crafted to enable popular Sinicization (Hsin 2012, 29). Music was used to demonstrate a sense of Chinese cultural identity for the purposes of supporting ROC sovereignty. Sponsorship benefited classical Chinese orchestras, which were considered embodiments of national high-culture aesthetics and became the dominant professional music groups (Ho 2007, 467). Surveillance came in various forms of censorship, in which local Taiwanese culture and subversive political expressions were repressed in favor of music that engendered a sense of being Chinese.

With growing economic prosperity and increasing dissent against KMT authoritarian rule, the late 1970s saw a shift away from a strict state agenda for popular music. Campus Folk music, a style of student songs that emerged on Taiwanese university campuses in the early 1970s, had grown from intimate student occasions into a popular culture phenomenon. This new movement did not openly antagonize the state, but neither did it completely comply with regulated aesthetics (Farrelly 2017, 226). Elements of the Western counterculture movement were now established in Taiwan, evident in unkempt youths brandishing long hair, hippie clothing, and recreational drugs. These youths were fond of the "simple and sincere" folk music imported from the United States, preferring simple melodies reflecting on themes of friendship and families. Yang Hsuan's 楊弦 1975 performance in Zhongshan Hall was a breakthrough for commercial and cultural interests. His music demonstrated the success of an industry geared toward the tastes and sensibilities of younger audiences. As the movement reached a broader audience, debate arose on the nature of Campus Folk's "Chinese flavor" (*zhongguo wei* 中國味) but drew few public conclusions beyond the complexities of promoting Chinese culture in Taiwan (Farrelly 2017, 226). The songs of this era were reflective of these

complexities, including predominantly Mandarin lyrics but addressing local themes accompanied by instrumentation derived from Western folk music.

Taiwanese-language music—that is, Hoklo/Hakka/indigenous peoples' languages—was repressed under martial law as inferior and uncouth. Scholar Meifen Hsin argues that Taiwanese-language songs from the 1970s produced both senses of being Chinese and otherness, thus embedding socioeconomic tensions in the music (Hsin 2012, 231). Taiwanese songs from this transformative period expressed cultural conflict entangled with the effects of colonial modernization. Although there is little evidence to suggest seeds of active resistance, these songs demonstrated changes in musical concepts and technology as part of industrialization and globalization. Therefore, when Lee Shuang-tse 李雙澤 made his now-mythologized 1978 call for Taiwanese to “sing your own song” (*chang ziji de ge* 唱自己的歌), as opposed to English-language songs imported from other countries, the plea manifested public articulations of local Taiwanese themes in Mandarin (Farrelly 2017, 238). Lee's song “Formosa” (Meilidao 美麗島), which depicted lived realities of agricultural society linked to Taiwanese ancestors, was censored that same year for being almost subversive. However, through the 1980s, the localization movement began shifting power toward Taiwan-centric histories and cultures. The political movement located its roots in the Japanese colonial era (1895–1945), claiming heritage in Taiwanese activists in the 1920s and 1930s who lobbied for increased Taiwanese autonomy and their contemporary equivalents advocating decreased cultural ties with China (Ho 2007, 467). In this context, localization describes empowerment of (re)emerging local music cultures, characterized by the recognition and maturation of Taiwanese languages, melodies, themes, and instrumentation. Yet, as demonstrated by the Campus Folk movement, this reemergence did not occur in isolation.

With the end of martial law in 1987, two distinct commercial categories of popular music had emerged: Mandarin-language music supported by the state and younger intellectual audiences, and Taiwanese-language music that was popular with working-class and elderly audiences. Producing Mandarin popular songs held previously greater socioeconomic advantages, but Taiwanese popular songs were rising to prominence (Hsin 2012, 231). From this newly liberated cultural soundscape emerged new forms of music simultaneously pushing Taiwanese-language music mainstream and enabling the rapid expansion of underground groups. Along with this resurgence came a search for authenticity and rebuilding of Taiwanese cultural identity. Alternative genres, such as rap and heavy metal, were imported from Western markets and localized. Taiwanese rappers engaged in local cultural revival through musical cosmopolitanism, drawing on Hoklo traditions of *liam-ku* (唸歌, translated as “chant song”) to inform renditions of rap. Ethnomusicologist Meredith Schweig (2014, 37) describes the “new Taiwanese song movement” as exercises in Taiwan-centered musical postmodernity. Artists diverged from their nativist forbears by embracing both foreign and modern, but simultaneously calling for new Hoklo music. The movement thus positioned “new” Taiwanese participation in a global order by resignifying global-local musical forms.

These expressions of alternative music carried transnational social concerns mixed with musical creativity. The hardcore genres of rap, punk, metal, and so on

modeled new musical techniques for engaging the sociopolitical while cornering niches of a rapidly expanding market. When traditional styles of Taiwanese music such as *liam-ku* faded as popular entertainment, rising stars invested them with symbolic capital as authentic loci of Taiwanese culture. Leading stars of Taiwanese rap Blacklist Studio 黑名單工作室, Jutoupi 豬頭皮 and Kao Chou Ching 拷秋勤 each reference *liam-ku* as strongly influencing the development of their work as authentic Taiwan-style rap (Schweig 2014, 49–56). Jutoupi studied less mainstream American rap artists for ways to integrate social concerns with Taiwanese music, treating rap as a concept informing local genres of music. Kao Chou Ching's work channels rap and *liam-ku* as sources of commentary and as symbols of Taiwanese cultural heritage, musically engaging with social and political activism as means of advocating Taiwanese identity. Blacklist Studio member Chen Ming-chang 陳明章 said that his Taiwanese-language music was inspired by the realization that his Mandarin music lacked both an emotional connection to the land and some reflection on local culture. Thus the production of new Taiwanese music adopted political significance in its creation of Taiwanese identities reconnecting with local cultures.

These forms of music embodied politics as values and experiences designed to move and change, rather than simply entertain or document. It is important to contextualize music as a dynamic cultural form receptive to and interactive with its surroundings. In a work published just prior to the 2014 student movements, anthropologist Chuang Ya-chung wrote about Taiwan's *Bentuhua* (本土化, translated as "Taiwanization") movement as a search for an indigenous space from which to contest the KMT's hegemonic Chinese nationhood (Chuang 2013, 91). *Bentuhua* movements can be found as early as the 1950s and their contemporary iterations continue to influence politics. The politics of *bentu* crafted identity processes to reconnect people to culture and encouraged repositioning individuals in political lives. These political identities were strongly influenced by ideological perceptions of cultures belonging to "China" and "Taiwan," with *bentu* signifying the indigeneity of the Taiwanese. Such indigenizing processes can be seen in "new Taiwanese" music as creating space in which to reconnect modern music and local culture. The emergence of Blacklist Studio's 1989 album *Songs of Madness* (Zhua kuang ge 抓狂歌) was not simply a reaction to martial law, but rather an action informed by a series of political processes creating conditions in which music resonated with and organized thought.

John Street, whose scholarly work on art and politics dates back decades, argues for a framework constructing music's capacity to engage as essential to understanding relationships between music and politics (2012, 72). According to Street, music is a unique challenge for interpretation, because sound and lyric are neither purely revelations of experience nor oral histories. As for the political, Street argues music should be considered political when it spills into the public realm as an exercise of power. He therefore identifies organization, legitimation, and performing participation as three key elements of music's capacity to engage politically. First, there must be forms of organization enabling musicians and political actors to cooperate. Second, musicians must be deemed as credible or authoritative voices. Third, the music must have the means to carry sentiment and motivation for a

cause. Therefore, although the most overt form of political music in Taiwan may be election campaign songs, the Taiwanese context enables us to delve deeper into music as politics outside the explicit politics of election season, and into the realm of local and social concerns as practiced by those engaging with youth power. Where the politics of *bentu* provides a historical lens for examining conflicts of identity and localization, recognizing music's capacity to engage provides an analytical lens for considering music itself as form of politics.

Inland Rock

Inland Rock was a two-day music festival held on September 24–25, 2016, in the township of Jiji 集集, Nantou (figure 1). The festival's goal was to symbolize resisting both PRC and ROC official claims to dominion of Taiwan by resignifying the term "inland" (*neidi* 內地) to mean Nantou instead of mainland China. Therefore, the festival was held in Nantou, to reconnect Taiwanese with a Taiwan-centric conception of the physical inland. The NPP, along with activist groups, had official booths at the festival in an effort to integrate with and promote their cause to audiences. Attendees, organizers, and performers participating in the festival sponsored and affirmed its ideology of Taiwanese sovereignty. Thus this festival, though not an explicit endorsement of politicians or parties as was common at election campaign performances, was a manifestation of music as political action in a way uncommon to electoral politics.



Figure 1. Entrance to the Inland Rock festival grounds, 2016. *Source:* Inland Rock Facebook page.

The primary organizer and creative talent behind Inland Rock was J Chen (*Chen Weizhong* 陳威仲), a founding member of the hip-hop group Kao Chou Ching, founder of design and production company Radical Studio (*Jijin gongzuoshi* 激進工作室), and designer of the unofficial Sunflower Student movement shirt

(Chiu 2014). The shirt became infamous when student activist Chen Wei-ting 陳為廷 was seen on a television interview during the occupation of the Legislative Yuan wearing a black shirt with white text that read, in English, “Fuck the government,” and, in Chinese, “It’s our country, we’ll save it ourselves” (*ziji guo jia zuiji jiu* 自己國家自己救). As an outspoken activist and proponent of Taiwanese independence, each of these projects carried Chen’s values of independence and action. Radical Studio doubled as a merchandise company and record label with the stated aims of using music to change the world and action to change Taiwan. The company’s merchandise consisted of streetwear clothing and accessories designed to send clear political messages with strong visual impact. As a music label, Radical Studio managed several prominent indie musicians and bands known for their social commentary and activism.

Chen’s idea for Inland Rock was inspired by the lyrics of fellow Taiwanese rapper Dwagie 大支, who also performed at Inland. Dwagie’s satirical song “Lanbaci” (蘭芭詞) criticizes Taiwanese artists for complying with CCP ideology at the expense of Taiwan so as to gain access to China’s market. This criticism extends to asserting Chinese cultural identity and heritage over the Taiwanese and ends with the line “Taiwan’s inland is Nantou!” (*Taiwan de neidi shi nantou* 台灣的內地是南投!). Upon hearing this song, Chen was overcome with both bitter laughter and anger at the poor-quality music and the self-interested artists selling out Taiwan (Harpsichord 2015). He recalled innumerable times that artists appeared in the media talking about China as “inland” and was moved to launch a movement to reclaim Taiwan’s discursive inland. Chen’s logic was to deploy the combined powers of musical affect, physical presence, material symbols, and community ties to create emotive, personal connections between Taiwanese and the inland. These elements, complemented by a call to personal action, constituted his design for Inland Rock and the accompanying slogan, “Where is your inland? Feel and define it yourself” (*Ni de neidi zai nali? You ni ziji lai ganshou yu dingyi* 你的內地在哪裡？由你自己來感受與定義).

The festival grounds were designed to constitute sovereign territory: a conceptual country defined by borders, customs, law, and authorities. The front entrance resembled an airport arrival terminal, where ticket inspectors issued entrance passes and welcomed arrivals to the inland. Signage at the entrance and advertisements throughout the site juxtaposed on a highway displayed the Chinese characters for “inland” and the romanization of Nantou, literally resignifying Nantou as Taiwan’s inland. Further signage made explicit claims, such as the “Taiwan is not a part of China,” in English. Artists who ran the risk of being banned from the PRC for not complying with China’s political claims on Taiwan were given safe haven in this territory. More than just repurposing linguistic symbols, these acts established an inverted space in which discourses of PRC and ROC sovereignty were rendered void and a nascent Taiwanese nation formed. In this sense, attendees engaged in a name rectification movement, a process of postcolonial transitional justice. In claiming Taiwan’s inland as Nantou, attendees symbolically affirmed creation of an independent sovereign territory and delegitimized ROC and PRC truth regimes. These signs and acts of participation framed the festival as political engagement, redefining Nantou as an “other” space, a world upside down (figure 2)



Figure 2. Banner inside the Inland Rock festival grounds. The characters read: “Taiwan’s inland is Nantou’ is no longer a slogan.” *Source:* Photo by author.

Despite having some aspects of a carnival, Inland Rock was not a comprehensive inversion festival in which the social world was turned entirely upside down. Although certain carnivalesque imagery, ideals, and expectations are associated with the stereotypical rock festival, Inland Rock experienced relatively few of the excesses depicted in Menippean satire (Chiang 2004). The essential carnivalesque act of mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king was present in the subversive destruction of the Chinese sovereign. As part of a viral movement transposed offline, festival attendees took turns satirically “apologizing to China” for advocating Taiwanese independence. Although such activities promoted free and familiar interactions between peoples, festival officials still enforced law and order. Organizers reminded participants, “This is our land, our home,” encouraging all to clean up the grounds. Sex, violence, and excessive use of drugs and alcohol were not permitted. Attendees were free to critique societal norms and institutions, but commercial sponsorship and licensing regulations sanitized the more extreme carnivalesque tendencies.

Structurally, Inland Rock consisted of two stages with separate performance lists. Despite the name, the festival’s music was not limited to rock; rock served as a broader identifier of a musical festival at which people “rocked” bodies and had fun. At this festival, rock encompassed performances across rap, hip-hop, folk, indie rock, and metal genres. One of the most anticipated acts, Dwagie, drew a large crowd of various backgrounds, causing seniors, businesspeople and dissident youths to dance and sing side-by-side. Dwagie’s final performance of “Taiwan Song” (台灣 SONG) was an explosively interactive experience, with crowds rapping verse and chorus. The song, performed in Hoklo, echoed themes from *lanbaci*, deriding those who embraced China and China’s associated identities at the expense of the Taiwan. The titular “SONG” doubles as the English word “song” and as the Hoklo pronunciation of 爽, which is roughly translated as “pleasure.” Dwagie called for unity through the shared experiences and fate of eating Taiwanese rice, drinking Taiwanese water, being born as a Taiwanese person, and eventually dying as a Taiwanese ghost.

Congratulating the crowd on sharing authentic Taiwanese hip-hop at Taiwan's inland, Dwagie energized the crowd with spoken-word chants of "Taiwan's inland is Nantou!" reminiscent of political rallies.

The primary headline act, however, was punk rock group Fire Ex (Miehuoqi 滅火器). Whereas some performers were relatively discreet in their political signaling, preferring to simply repeat the festival slogan, Fire Ex was renowned for its open advocacy of Taiwanese independence. The band created the anthem of the Sunflower Student movement, "Island Sunrise" ("Daoyu tianguang" 島嶼天光), and later performed at the inauguration of DPP president Tsai Ing-wen ("Miehuoqi ganren yanchang Yang dazheng xiang zhongtong shuo jiayou" 2016). "Island Sunrise" became a staple of youth pop at the time and won Song of the Year at the 2015 Golden Melody Awards. The band's earlier song, "Goodnight, Formosa" ("Wanan Taiwan" 晚安台灣), was frequently played at social movements, as both encouragement and lamentation. Both songs romanticized Taiwan and encouraged perseverance and bravery in the face of darkness. Mid-set at Inland Rock, vocalist Sam Yang 楊大正 spoke to the crowd, only to be eventually drowned out by chants of "Taiwan-China, a country on each side!," to which he responded by declaring "Taiwan is Taiwan, China is China; Taiwan's inland is Nantou!" During these in-between moments, downtime between songs, musicians shape the context of their performances, altering the flow of music and audience interaction. Yang spoke about the creativity and values of Radical Studio's Inland Rock, encouraging audiences to reflect on the term "inland," to think and feel where their inland is located. Effecting catharsis, his articulation of Taiwanese sovereignty was a profane declaration releasing socially prohibited emotive political expression.

Through their performances, the artists produced identities and experiences constituting Taiwan and Taiwanese-ness. Although not necessarily propagating ideological narratives explicitly, they each produced affect to movement through sound, delivering personal and collective resources of culture. Where Dwagie's rap delivered discursive claims to authentic Taiwanese-ness in contrast to fake Chineseness, Fire Ex's energetic rebellion empowered the brave Taiwanese to struggle against overwhelming odds for the sake of defending Taiwan. The performances were delivered in different languages, with musicians often switching between Hoklo and Mandarin while on stage. Sam Yang and Dwagie both spoke of writing lyrics in their mother tongue, Hoklo, as natural, but typically addressed audiences in Mandarin—evidence of the legacy of the Chinese Cultural Renaissance movement and martial-law censorship of Taiwanese languages. These new Taiwanese identities communicated through both an official language (Mandarin) and a subversive mother tongue (Hoklo), in addition to minority languages. Adding to the linguistic diversity of the festival, Aborigine folk singers created temporary choral communities, which contrasted sharply with the emotionally raw and technically overbearing soundscapes of metal bands. Each of these singers added their voices to represent and connect the festive collective, constructing a pluralistic community.

Aside from artistically expressing experienced and idealized identities, Inland Rock provided valuable insight into activist youth engagement with political music. Thus—in Street's (2012) framework of music's capacity to politically engage,

discussed earlier—Inland Rock mobilized expressions of music as politics. The festival constituted deliberative processes in which musicians and audiences jointly mediated constructions of Taiwanese subjects. Private and government actors cooperated to facilitate the organization of musical and political interests, providing infrastructure to create the occasion. The musicians were engaging and credible, legitimated as authoritative representatives of Taiwanese lived experiences. The vast array of social media and associated nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) present at the site physically and online provided means to channel sentiment from the festival into broader communities in participants' everyday lives and through structured activism. As such, the musical politics of Inland Rock constituted *bentu* politics, embedding (in)land in a shared cultural consciousness as authentically Taiwanese while deploying musical cosmopolitanism to complement new postmodern identities.

Tshingsan Fest

Tshingsan Fest was a smaller-scale musical festival held in November 2016 in a local park of Wanhua district in Taipei. Commemorating the annual three-day festival of the Tshingsan King Ritual (*Qingshan lingan zunwang* 青山靈安尊王), the event combined a musical concert and the Monga (alternatively, Bangka) Tshingsan Temple's traditional pilgrimage (*mengjia Qingshanwang raojing* 艋舺青山王遶境). (figure 3). The Tshingsan ritual is one of Taipei's oldest and liveliest religious events, and is an important sociocultural tradition for the local community. Although the religious festivities were a regular annual event, the rock concert was a new initiative proposed to (re)connect Taiwanese, especially local youths, to the temple community (Wu 2016). Because Monga had one of the largest numbers of temples of any district in Taipei, local leaders were concerned that the perceived downturn of youth participation in district traditional communities would result in the eventual loss of temple culture. The Greater Taipei Cultural Association and the Tshingsan Temple Association joined with recently elected district legislator Freddy Lim 林昶佐 to revitalize and make relevant Monga's cultural heritage to a younger generation of Taiwanese.



Figure 3. Banner advertising Tshingsan Fest. The Tshingsan King is depicted in the center, surrounded by mascots representing some of the bands that performed at the festival. Source: Tshingsan Fest Facebook page.

Lim, a founding member and one of the five elected legislators of the NPP, was deeply engaged with social activism. He participated regularly in social movements and political rallies, promoted Taiwanese and Tibetan independence, and served as head of Amnesty International Taiwan. Most famously, he was the founder and vocalist of the internationally acclaimed metal band Chthonic (Shanling 閃靈). For some, the election of Lim, a controversial political figure, symbolized the arrival of the “youth era” of “new politics,” in which a long-haired, tattooed death-metal screamer could stand in parliament as an elected politician and advocate Taiwanese independence (Qiu and Wu 2015). Lim deployed his dual identity as a musician-politician to break through sociocultural barriers dividing music and politics, rejecting assertions of “music as music, politics as politics.” In this capacity, he performed at Tshingsan Fest as a political musician, rather than a musical politician. In contrast to a previous electoral campaign concert in Liberty Square (*Zhenhun huguo yanchanghui* 鎮魂護國演唱會), Lim and the NPP did not deploy any party symbols or attire, nor deliver official party rhetoric. Instead, the music performed at the Fest, as it became known, mobilized and shaped local politics.

Compared with Inland Rock, the Fest was a small, local event with a more traditional temple aesthetic. The grounds at Heping Qingcao Park consisted only of a single stage, audience space, and several adjacent stalls. As a free public event, the space was open, and people flowed in and around the grounds all night. The vendors, however, were commercial enterprises, including local food and drink stores, and relevant music merchandise. The stage was decorated with backlit “merit lanterns” (*gongde denglong* 功德燈籠) inscribed with the names of event volunteers and sponsors, the majority of whom were NPP members. In keeping with youth-activist resource-mobilization strategies, the event was advertised primarily online through social media, with links to information and further media provided by associated cultural organizations, delivering social and historical context. The primary advertisement featured sketches of several musicians, including Lim’s musician persona decorated with performance face paint, all centered on the Tshingsan King. The figures had animal heads and human bodies, representing the personas of rock bands scheduled to perform at the Fest as well as symbolizing the shared cultural heritage of local music and religion. Organizers designed joint temple and rock aesthetics to establish an element of tradition by which youths would recognize and resonate with the “noise and excitement” (*renao* 熱鬧) of both traditional and modern cultures.

The headline act was to be Lim’s band Chthonic, but instead he and guitarist Jessie “Black” Liu 小黑 joined with the band Flesh Juicer (Xierou guozhiji 血肉果汁機) for a collaborative performance (figure 4). Chthonic has deployed distinctive Taiwanese aesthetics and symbolism throughout its work and identifies the band’s genre as “Taiwanese metal.” The band fused the instrumentation and vocals of black metal with a variety of symphonic and folk accompaniments, including *hiân-á* 絃仔, *zheng* 箏 (*koto*), and *yueqin* 月琴 (moon lute), as well as indigenous Taiwanese vocals and melodies. Chthonic’s lyrics reflected the “Taiwanese consciousness” proclaimed by its members, often relating to marginalized events and peoples (Qiu and Wu 2015). Although Lim initially wrote lyrics in classical Chinese, he switched to Taibun 台文, a script representing his

mother tongue. Chthonic's songs about such events as the 1930 Wushe Uprising, the 228 Massacre, and the 1987 Green Island prison break mythologized Taiwanese history as colonial tragedy. Other, more ideologically explicit works include Next Republic ("Gonghe" 共和) and Supreme Pain for the Tyrant ("Poyezhan" 破夜斬), which draw on a heroic democracy narrative to describe the establishment of the Republic of Taiwan and the assassination of an ROC sovereign. Chthonic and Lim are considered the founders of Taiwanese heavy metal, their brand established at live houses and festivals around Taiwan.



Figure 4. Chthonic's Freddy Lim and Jessie Liu performing with Fleshjuicer onstage at Tsinghsan Fest. *Source:* Freddy Lim Facebook page.

Chthonic's performance at the Fest opened with the track Next Republic, which started with a recording of the revolutionary "father of Taiwanese independence" Su Beng 史明, singing the opening lines of his poem, Taiwanese Nationalism ("Taiwan minzu zhuyi 台灣民族主義). As is the tradition at Chthonic concerts, fans immediately tossed joss paper and created a mosh pit opposite center stage. These two acts symbolize the postmodern fusion of Taiwanese cultural tradition with the globalizing force of metal music. Chthonic's fans traditionally engage in several subversive rituals during concerts, including burning KMT flags and heckling those on stage to "speak Taiwanese!" (*Kóng tâi-gí* 講台語). Tossing joss money is simultaneously a form of ancestor worship and rebellion against a historically oppressive, hegemonic state. Chthonic's songs glorify the defiance and sacrifice of Taiwanese heroes past, praising their courage and valor in fighting against colonial oppressors. The audience brings to life these narratives by honoring their sacrifices, the action of tossing joss money creating and reaffirming the power of music as political practice. This realization is also an act of rebellion, defying institutional regulations that dictate rituals of worship and authorities that censor histories and heroes. The physical act of moshing embodies movement and community, building

solidarity through collective action. The mosh pit at the Fest moved collectively in time to the musical performance, while experienced moshers protected and guided others, structuring movements and sequences. Chthonic's audiences interacted with the musical performance through these rituals as social actors, deliberating and producing political actions through movement, language, and sound.

The band Flesh Juicer is a Taiwanese metal group informally described as Chthonic's spiritual successor. The folk components of its recorded music at the Fest were not as varied or prolific as Chthonic's and nor were the band's politics as explicit. Flesh Juicer's lyrics were performed exclusively in Hoklo and interwoven with tales of gods, spirits, and funerals, all designed to take audiences "into the universe." The band's front man, Gigo Pro 仲宇, derived his alias (and the band's debut album title, *Gigo*) from the Hoklo pronunciation of "brother pig" (*tiko* 豬哥), a name reinforced by the pig headpiece he wears when performing (Wen 2015). Careful not to reveal the face behind the mask, Gigo personified the band as the familiar strange, summoning forth signs of everyday culture through stories and symbols, hinting at surreal realities. Gigo wore the pig headpiece—to which he attached dreadlocks and engraved the words "void" (*xuwu* 虛無) and "awaken" (*juexing* 覺醒) to create a sense of the surreal—to draw a connection with Taiwanese feasts and festivals. Flesh Juicer's music was steeped in Taiwanese religious symbolism and practice, but in an interview, the band members simply told me that these symbols and practices reflected traditional culture. Rather than aiming to explicitly perform politics in line with Chthonic's reputation, their purpose was to deliver "positive energy" through music to improve society.

Flesh Juicer's two most popular songs relate the mythology behind the album and enact stories of conflict among gods. In the story of Gigo, the five-worlds universe contained an additional sixth world into which all negative aspects of existence were channeled. In the song Event of the Falling Sky ("Tianbeng dashijian" 天崩大事件), the darkness of the sixth world threatened to escape, causing the gods to create a sixth god to contain and manage the darkness. That world is where humans exist, and Gigo, in the form of a pig-headed human body, becomes its god. The album's next song, Funeral ("Shangshan" 上山), depicts a Daoist priest trying to combat negative energy, eventually summoning forth Flesh Juicer, who defeats the manifest energy through musical ritual. These two songs show the power of humanity in music and the importance of energy in shaping human relations. Gigo is cast as a godlike figure but represents the potential of humanity in belief and action. Inspired by Chthonic's Taiwanese metal success, Flesh Juicer draws forth Taiwanese spiritual culture as music to inspire and affect positive social change.

These desires are more obvious in Flesh Juicer's live performances, especially at Tshingsan Fest and large-scale events like Megaport. The band has performed reinterpretations of popular music with altered lyrics to critique social issues, transforming Kelly Chen's 陈慧琳 *Dancing* ("Buru tiaowu" 不如跳舞) into a song about rejecting drugs in favor of dance, and Wilbur Pan 潘瑋柏's "Tell Me" into a call to care for stray animals. Fan interactions, too, become more elaborate at live performances, though they are often still codified through the mythology of Gigo. During performances, hardcore fan movements are at times so structured as to almost seem choreographed. For example, the very end of "Funeral" falls into a soft

melody and articulates expressions commonly spoken at Taiwanese funerals. During this part of the song, fans often gather in front of Gigo, kneeling, praying, and worshipping the pig-headed deity. Fans typically engage online and at concerts with the spiritual and surreal aspects of the musical discourse, adopting symbols and rituals of the band. However, the musician behind Gigo has described worship as primarily a matter of thought, insisting that audiences themselves create Gigo and are therefore all gods themselves (Wen 2015). Thus, Gigo's performances and interactions with fans at Tshingsan Fest held special contextual significance, because the persona's existence was derived from the temple cultures the Fest was designed to revitalize.

Like those at Inland Rock, the audiences at Tshingsan engaged in transformative experiences as localizing processes. Rather than resignifying a place name in a campaign to contest the popular lexicon, *bentuhua* here describes reimaginings of Taiwanese identity grounded in temple cultures as crucial foundations for the sociopolitical. Onstage, Lim encouraged festival attendees to join in the Tshingsan pilgrimage in person or via social media broadcasts, visit the Monga temples, and participate in local cultural communities. Further, referring to activist concerts held previously in locations such as Liberty Square and the Ministry of Education grounds, Lim publicly set the goal of performing next in parliament. Having already reclaimed parliament in an official political capacity through the 2016 elections, he aimed to do so in his musical capacity as well. In this sense, music was a tool enabling and symbolizing political conquest, as well as cultural expression connecting people with deliberative experiences. Chthonic and Flesh Juicer's performances were ways of interacting with the Monga social environment and creating affective change through reproducing readings and practices of Taiwanese culture and history. Although Flesh Juicer did not perform politics in the manner of Lim-as-politician, its radius of creativity and claim to cultural credibility was strongly aligned with the Tshingsan context, enabling a musical avenue to imagine new sociopolitical realities.

Tshingsan Fest was thus more than just a themed concert coinciding with a temple procession. The Fest did not explicitly target KMT or ROC sovereignty in the manner of Inland Rock, but it nevertheless advocated for change at the grassroots, local level. More than just marketing for Tshingsan temple, the Fest itself enacted music as politics. The festival was depoliticized in the sense that no official political signifiers or rhetoric were invoked, but the organizers still connected musicians and political actors to produce a local, cosmopolitan Taiwanese culture. Musicians deployed discourses of authentic Taiwanese identities for audiences to experience, critique, and reproduce sociopolitical practices reconnecting people to politics and culture. Audiences were, at one level, mobilized to revitalize local temple culture, but at a deeper level they were positioned to receive and enact cultural expression as legitimate forms of social activism and everyday politics.

Conclusion

This article has illuminated an aspect of youth-activist culture outside the more commonly studied context of electoral politics by demonstrating how two music festivals, Inland Rock and Tshingsan Fest, were sites at which music and politics

converged in spaces and symbols were resignified to construct new Taiwanese identities. Through contextualizing the emergence of new Taiwanese music, the article identified themes of authenticity, modernization, globalization, and localization as key historical forces informing constructions of contemporary musical concepts. After martial law ended, Taiwanese music was liberated to reconnect with local linguistic and cultural heritages but was also transcoded into globalized genres. Activists deployed both of these forces to critique social norms and articulate dissident politics, producing a Taiwan-centered musical postmodernity. The two festivals demonstrated the argument that music is more than just a communicative medium, and is itself political practice made manifest. The festivals had overt goals: to resignify Taiwan's "inland" as Nantou and to reconnect youths with Monga temple culture. The creation, mediation, and reproduction of music at these sites both embodied and enacted political values, and also organized social responses as political actions.

If music facilitates an embodiment of cultural heritage, is socially contextualized through performance, and can inform political actions, then it becomes a means of connecting everyday experiences to politics. More than just a text with intrinsic meaning, music itself can constitute interactive reconstructions of collective identities grounded in sound, space, discourse, and practice. Sound and lyrics can be more than just experiential or historical, as music reconnects people to culture and politics. In the case of Inland Rock, Nantou was performatively rendered as Taiwan's (in)land through the construction of a conceptual sovereign space inside which the ROC and PRC hierarchies were inverted. The carnivalesque attributes of the festival complemented the dissenting contestation of sovereignty, which combined with musicians' productions of authentic Taiwanese-ness. In the case of Tshingsan Fest, local Taiwanese histories and traditional cultures were fused with musical cosmopolitanism to reconnect youths to local temple culture and new Taiwanese identities. These renditions of distinctly Taiwanese metal music informed the politics of local culture and social concerns. Here, too, the carnivalesque inverted social norms, glorifying the profane in religious and musical rituals.

These two festivals directly connected music, culture, and politics as interpersonal experiences. Youth-activist identity as performed at these festivals comprised both local and global components, reproduced through cosmopolitan Taiwanese music. Youth activism was a powerful reemerging force in the 2016 elections and is starting to be institutionalized in formal politics. Taiwan's civil society and activist landscapes continue to rapidly change, accelerating with technological integration and changing youth engagement. Describing festivals as analytical resources for understanding activist cultures and theorizing the role of music as politics in performing identity practices captures a slice of this dynamic Taiwanese context.

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