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Phònè and the political potential of metal music : a scholarly intervention

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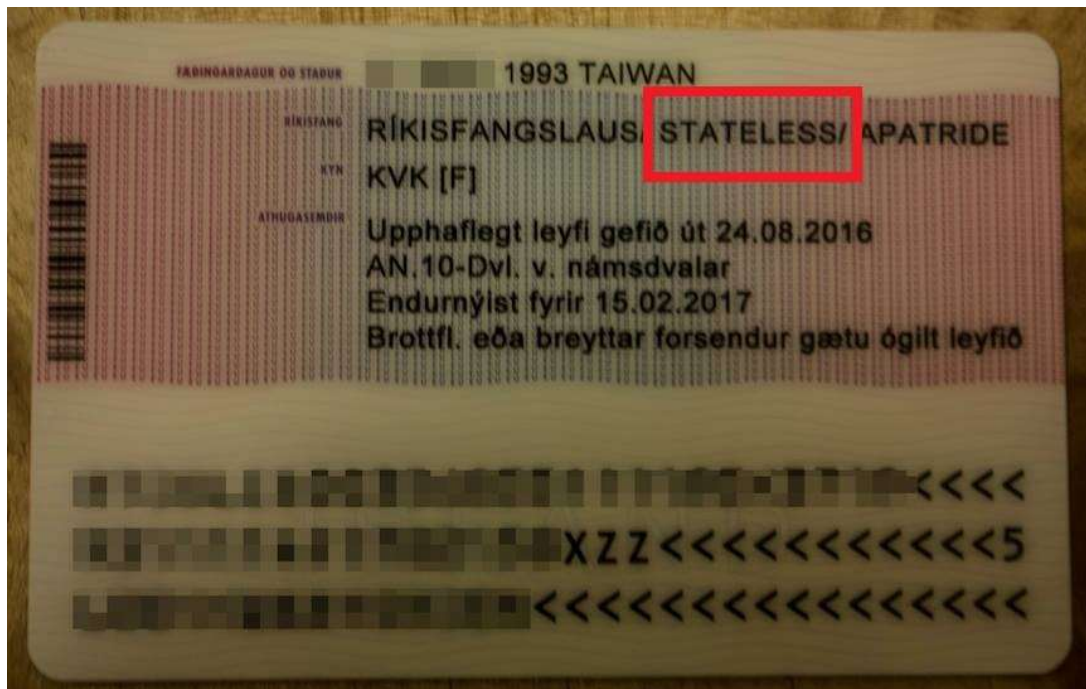
Chapter Four

Ghost Island: The Desire for Identity in Taiwanese Metal

In the previous chapters, by engaging with metal music and focusing on *phónè* in metal, I contested metal's scenic-scholarly politics and repositioned metal in relation to wider politics and philosophical critiques of (bio)politics. I further proposed to read metal as a political-philosophical ability and as a form of criticism of philosophical maneuvers that use *phónè* for political purposes. Central to these chapters was how a distorted and amplified *phónè* in metal brings attention to different dimensions of (bio)politics. The previous chapters can thus be considered in terms of my own scholarly political interventions, first on metal's scenic-scholarly level, second on a philosophical and epistemological level, and third, on the implications of these two on a socio-political level.

So far, I have limited my analyses to metal music from the West. In this chapter, I would like to extend my discussion to metal music in Taiwan. The choice of Taiwanese metal, as I explained in my introduction, is based on two considerations. First, I want to address a problematic that arises from *phónè* in metal. Second and more importantly, I want to shed light on the tradition of political activism in Taiwanese metal in the context of the extremity of Taiwan's political situation.

One aspect of this extremity can be traced in what is internationally regarded as Taiwan's precarious situation. See, for instance, the resident permit of a friend of mine who studied in Iceland.



Resident permit of a Taiwanese listed as stateless, authorized use by Wen-Chien Lee (李宛蓓)¹

¹ For details, see "Student Rails Against 'Stateless' ID." *Taipei Times*, 20 Nov. 2016,

A Taiwanese citizen is here listed as “stateless”. One may conclude that, despite being an independent political body, Taiwan is not recognized as an official state. Consequently, Taiwan dwells in the international world of states as a destitute being, constantly being rejected, isolated, and devocalized by an international community. On a state level, but also on an individual and a collective level, Taiwan is living a kind of bare life, as Agamben would put it.² The voiceless status of Taiwan in the international realm, moreover, cannot be dissociated from the country’s many contested histories and memories.³ Even internally, the “voice of Taiwan” has been passionately disputed and contested by Taiwanese actors themselves, all searching for their voices and striving to be heard. Such an internationally voiceless and internally noisy situation is aptly captured by Taiwan’s nickname, the “ghost island (鬼島).” Not surprisingly, spectrality is a recurrent theme in Taiwanese metal.

This chapter centers around the question of *phónè*, understood as the indistinguishable pair of voice/sound, in relation to Taiwan, by analyzing seven Taiwanese songs. From the position of a cultural “insider,” the cultural capital and privileges of which I am not always comfortable with, I start by explaining some roles played by voices/sounds in subject formations of Taiwanese identities by considering its soundscapes. I then pay attention to how certain voices, sounds, and images in Taiwanese metal function to construct a collective identity of the people of Taiwan (who will later also be termed “folk”). Finally, I reflect on, and reassess Taiwanese metal by considering its political activism and political problematics in unison.

Alternatively put, this chapter is my own homecoming journey and political act of voicing (a part of) Taiwan, as a Taiwanese. By writing about Taiwanese metal, I also write about the memories and histories of Taiwan, and bring my scholarly expertise together with a partially autobiographical one.

1. Soundscapes

*It is necessary to listen to and confront the place where we live.
It is necessary to sort out the voice of our everyday environment.*

. . .

www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2016/11/20/2003659621. and “Taiwanese Woman Settles for being Classified as ‘Stateless’ over ‘Chinese’ on Iceland Residence Permit.” *shanghaiist*, 22 Nov. 2016, shanghaiist.com/2016/11/22/taiwanese_stateless_iceland.php.

² The official name of Taiwan is “Republic of China,” shortened as ROC, easily confused with the official name of China, “People’s Republic of China,” shorted as PRC. The ROC was officially acknowledged as the one and only Republic of China from 1912 to 1949, but became a separate entity after its government had fled to Taiwan. Since its joining the UN in 1971 (and Taiwan’s drop out from the UN), China has repressed uses of the name Taiwan, one example being that Taiwan can only attend international gatherings as “Chinese Taipei.”

³ The major powers ruling Taiwan since the 17th century are: the Dutch colony of southern Taiwan (1624-1662) and the Spanish occupation of the northern part (1626-1642), the Kingdom of Tungning (1662-1683), the Qing dynasty (1683-1895), the Japanese rule (1895-1945), and the ROC since 1945.

Sound all have a hidden latent strength of the flow, it activates space and events, and forms an essential part of a personal inner life of emotions, and the world of thinking and consciousness of the basic components.

Resistance forgotten—through listening, evoking memories of the debris and restructuring it again.

Profound mediocrity—Listen to the place where the life of ordinary life soundscape, layering another future archeology.

(Wu)⁴

Moving back and forth between Taiwan and the Netherlands, every time I return to one of them I am always brought into a state of shock, whether by the noisy and lively soundscapes of Taiwan or the peaceful and murmuring soundscapes of the Netherlands. But I always get used to the profound mundanity of each place by closing my ears to undesirable forms of *phónè* – until the next state of shock attacks me. Quite often, just to keep my ears attuned to the vibrancy/density of noise the Netherlands lacks, I randomly click through the online *Taiwan Sound Map Project*. In cities and major towns, there are typical urban noises such as the horns of cars, scooters, and buses, as well as temple gatherings, shouts in traditional markets, and kids playing in school. I move the mouse to the central and mountainous areas and hear natural sounds such as insects and birds singing, the rustling of the trees, the murmurs of the streams and mountain springs, and the wind, interspersed, now and then, with cars passing by. I move again to the coastal areas and hear sounds of the sea, sometimes tranquil sometimes turbulent, at times disrupted by boat horns. I click on the islands and hear slight differences in people's accents.

In these soundscapes, I hear different kinds of music and people, laughing, talking, and chatting in different dialects and languages that are often mixed up. Or, in my room at my home in Taichung, the main city in central Taiwan, I hear most of the above voices and sounds together. At night, I hear the humming pumps, the choirs of washing machines, the chanting of mantras, neighbors washing dishes and playing mahjong (麻將); in the early morning, I hear roosters crowing, birds chirping, cars and scooters passing, neighbors cooking, talking, and chatting. These voices and sounds, mundane and noisy as they sometimes are, assure me that *I am home*, surrounded by everyday activities of people and things.

According to Amanda Weidman, the metaphysical and linguistic traditions in the West have bequeathed an imagination of voice as standing for individuality, agency, authority, power, presence, and truth (232-33). In Taiwan, the imagination of voice/sound 聲音 (pronounced *siann-im* in Taiwanese, *sheng-yin* in Mandarin), or more commonly as 聲 (*siann*) in Taiwanese, is more complex.⁵ Voice is not the privileged possession of human beings. The environment that contains all beings also speaks through soundscapes. People's voices, consequently, are *modulated* by and *interact* with soundscapes. This modulation can be rephrased by way of a few

⁴ Wu Tsan-Cheng. About. *Taiwan Sound Map Project*, n.d., www.soundandtaiwan.com/soundmap/about.html.

⁵ The spelling systems used in this chapter are simplified (without indications of tones) Tongyong Pinyin and Taiwanese Romanization System. Tongyong Pinyin is based on Taiwanized Mandarin. I use this system to indicate how phrases are pronounced in Mandarin used in Taiwan. This is not to be confused with Taiwanese, which is a sinophonic dialectic, spelled according to the Taiwanese Romanization System. When I transcribe spellings, I also specify which language is spelled: for example, 閃靈 *siam-ling* in Taiwanese, *shan-ling* in Mandarin.

Taiwanese phrases. People and the environment make voice and sound, 出聲 (*tshut-siann*), making their presence and concurrence known, 聲援 (*siann-uan*), in many manners. It can be a simple response made as an echo 應聲 (*in-siann*), in a coarse manner 梢聲 (*sau-siann*), or in a sharp way 含瘁聲 (*ham-he-siann*). Together, voices, sounds, and soundscapes form a kind of sonorous cosmos where beings of past, present, and future coexist as one whole sound block. This co-presence in a sonorous term is aptly captured by the musically-inflected phrase 尾聲 (*bue-siann*) which, on the one hand, designates the endings of activity and conversation, and on the other, what these endings mean and imply but do not make explicit.⁶

In this chapter, when I refer to voice and sound as *siann*, I use the shorthand term “voice.” Voice in the Taiwanese context should be understood as collective and reciprocal. The holistic understanding of voice in the Taiwanese context is brought to attention in a quote by Wu Tsan-Cheng (吳燦政), the sound artist and coordinator of the 台灣聲音地圖 or the *Taiwan Sound Map Project*. Wu describes environmental sound as a kind of voice, and reflects on the perceptual and emotional implications of this. Voices, sounds, and soundscapes contribute to the subject formation of the Taiwanese people; taken together, they form a dynamic field that, according to Wu, shapes people’s ways of acting and thinking in a powerful, but not immediately obvious manner.

Sound [sic] all have a hidden latent strength. . . . it activates space and events, and forms an essential part of a personal inner life of emotions, and the world of thinking and consciousness. . . .⁷

This sonorous but not always perceptible subject formation, Wu points out, is often in tension. This tension is between forgetting and remembering, which, he implies, are two basic components of consciousness. Listening to soundscapes is an act of resistance, an excavation of memories and a refusal to forget them. Yet, Wu adds, this act does not totally exclude forgetting, since excavation is also a filtering and selection of certain voices and sounds, a dynamic he describes as *mediocre*. By this he means that the moderate quality of “mediocrity” results from acts of balancing to achieve a middle course. Both mediocrity and balancing are indicated by the following characters: 中庸 (*jhong-yuan* in Mandarin). These characters convey a negotiation between two forces, in Wu’s reflection, between remembering and forgetting, between foregrounded memories, and histories and background undertones. When I listen to soundscapes, I pick up some voices and sounds I once ignored, and recollect and restructure them as part of my memory and consciousness. Yet, at the same time, I also neglect other voices and sounds that nevertheless modulate me. Not yet restructured, sometimes not fully comprehensible, but nevertheless experienced, these voices and sounds dwell in and around me, as a kind of unconsciousness.

To expand my above reflection about soundscapes and the tension between forgetting and remembering, I will read two songs with religious themes in this section: THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN or 眾神護臺灣 from the album with the same title: 眾神護臺灣 or *The Gods Bless Taiwan* (2010) by the Taiwanese rock band Chairman (董事長樂團); and a song called FUNERAL 上山

⁶ 尾聲 in *Dictionary of Common Taiwanese Phrases*, Ministry of Education, Taiwan, twblg.dict.edu.tw.

⁷ Wu Tsan-Cheng. About. *Taiwan Sound Map Project*, n.d., www.soundandtaiwan.com/soundmap/about.html.

(*GIGO*, 2014) by the Taiwanese metalcore band Flesh Juicer (血肉果汁機). As this section will gradually reveal, my choice of these two songs is intended to highlight how soundscapes can contribute to shape Taiwanese identities and subjectivities. I furthermore pay special attention to a certain sound shared by the two songs, and consider their phonic unconsciousness.

i.

THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN and the Representational Soundscape of Taiwan

THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN is a song celebrating Taiwanese traditional activities, especially those of religions.⁸ What is of interest about the song is how the band Chairman samples and organizes music in events like temple gatherings (廟會), marches to celebrate gods (出巡), and Taiwanese folk opera performances (歌仔戲). The sampling is done in such a way that this song itself can also be considered a gathering.⁹ Opening with music of a temple gathering and concluding with music of god marches, THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN suggests a journey that, however precarious, is blessed by the gods and will eventually end well.

Below I visualize the sound blocks in which this song can be divided. Here, a clarification is needed. Despite of slight variations in the percussion, the transitions are very similar, and can all be put in grey. I nevertheless opt to highlight block 7 in red, as two elements indicate that this part bears a particular meaning. First, at 02:33-02:46, there appears a musical and narrative shift; it suggests that the song moves from a temple gathering to a gods march. Second, at 03:02-03:16, a certain phonic quality undermines THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN.

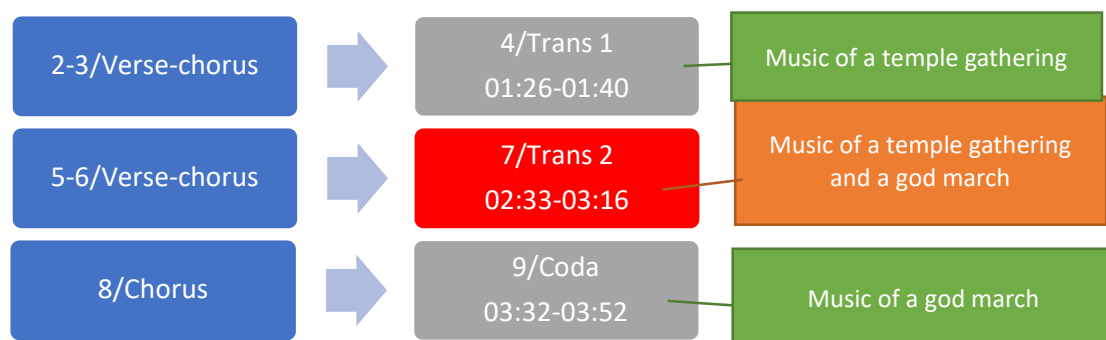


⁸ THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN. 27 Apr. 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJvOmRcw79o. A clarification in case of confusion: the official English title uses “Gods” in line with the polytheist religious tradition in Taiwan; some unofficial *YouTube* videos use the term “God,” possibly resulting from the polytheist traditions in which all gods share the same divinity, or due to an unfamiliarity with the connotation of God in the West.

For a scholarly overview of religious culture and practices in Taiwan, see *Religion and the Formation of Taiwanese Identities* (2003) edited by Paul Katz and Harvey Rubenstein, and *Religion and Democracy in Taiwan* (2009) by Cheng-Tian Kuo. For an example of the sonorous cosmology of all beings, see Mei-lin Lee and Te-hsiung Sun, “The Family and Demography in Contemporary Taiwan” (1995); for a case study of temple gatherings, see Vicky Wen-qi Yao (姚文琦), “台灣廟會活動的閒暇向度及其宗教意涵 The Leisure Dimension of Temple Festival Activities in Taiwan and Its Religious Meaning” (2010); see also Chia-lin Chang (張家麟), “台灣民間信仰的宗教靈療方法及其信仰基礎 Religious Therapy and Its Faith Base of Taiwan’s Folk Belief” (2009). It must be noted that these scholarly works only cover some branches of folk religions in Taiwan. Readers interested in Taiwanese folk religions in general can refer to en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Taiwan.

The English lyrics in this chapter are my translations. The original Taiwanese lyrics and official English lyrics, if provided by the bands, can be found in the Appendix. It should also be noted that the Taiwanese lyrics in the Appendix are transcribed in traditional Chinese characters due to the lack of a standard Taiwanese writing system.

⁹ Song graphics in this chapter are modified to highlight my respective focuses. Temple gatherings designate various ceremonies, usually related to birthdays of the gods, taking place in temples, while god marches designate processions that can be months long, during which the believers carry the gods in sedan chairs and travel between towns and cities. Taiwanese folk opera designates several styles of folk performances. During the temple gatherings, folk operas are performed outside the temples for people’s entertainment.



The song is also famous for its visual remediation. The music video abounds with images and footages of religious activities revering/celebrating several gods, modern urban scenes, and scenes of nature. It taps into the sonorous cosmology that is central to the religious diversity and tolerance in Taiwanese society, and advocates traditional values to enable the Taiwanese to find a middle course, and to find a balance between the traditional and the modern, the natural and the cultural.

In their album concept that can be found on *YouTube*, Chairman makes their appreciation of traditional Taiwanese activities clear, and further elaborates on how these are brought together by religions:

In Taiwan, a temple is the center of people's belief as compared to the church in western world. . . . Chairman thinks these traditional activities are valuable to Taiwan people so it samples in its album a few of Taiwanese local opera music, which can best represent Taiwanese traditional culture.¹⁰

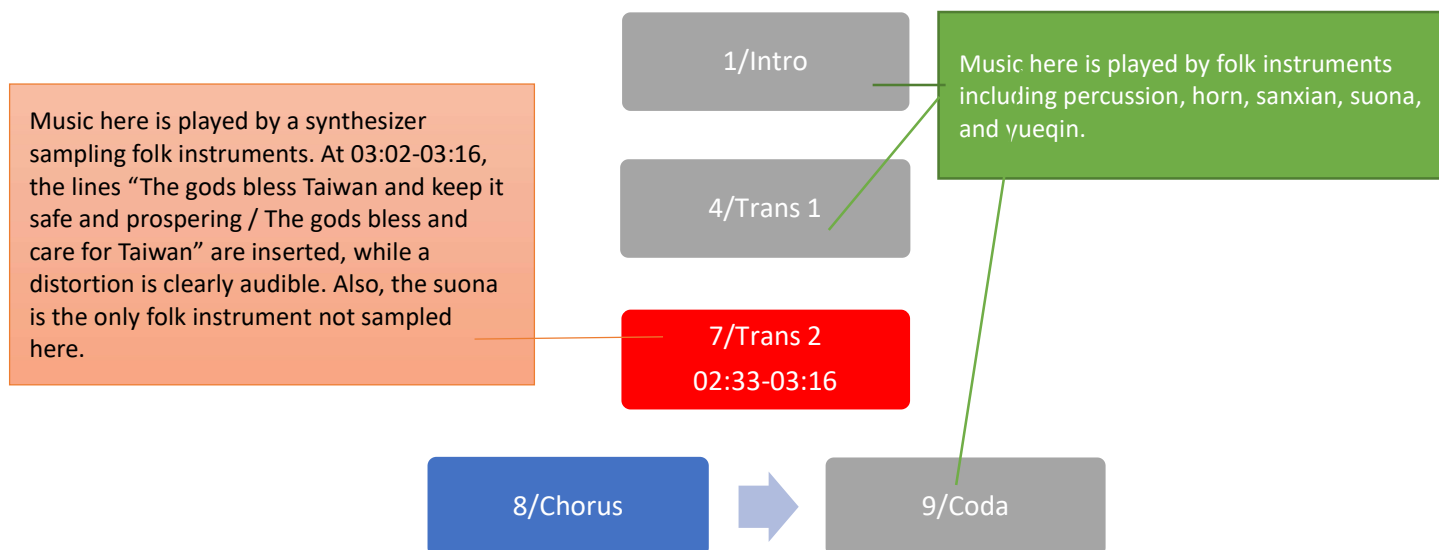
At least two dissonances emerge from this statement. First, the analogy between the temple and the Western church simplifies the internal complexities of both. Second, the band's claim to represent a singular Taiwanese traditional culture is problematic. Although *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* is generally well received and triumphed at the Golden Melody Awards (金曲獎) in 2011, critics did not fail to note the troublesome musical, cultural, ethnic, and political associations. Lin Shan-wei (林勝韋), a music critic and journalist, for example, suggests that Chairman's self-proclamation as indie rock music which represents Taiwan "tries too hard to represent" and the song at best represents what is politically correct, or at worst is a total misrepresentation of Taiwanese traditions.¹¹ Given the complex and painful histories and memories of Taiwan, the musical, cultural, ethnic, and political associations of the song are indeed inadequate in terms of representation. For instance, Taiwanese who do not identify with the blend of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism do not necessarily feel blessed by the benevolent gods. The cultural hegemony at stake, here, can be traced in the song itself. Therefore, I would like to draw attention to what I consider to be a self-undermining phonic moment.

The audible distortion effect at 03:02-03:16, when a journey for the Taiwanese people has

¹⁰ "Album Concept." 27 Apr. 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJvOmRcw79o.

¹¹ "What the Fuck is about Indie Music?: Observing Localizations in Jeannie Hsieh and Chairman." 29 Aug. 2014, www.thinkingtaiwan.com/content/3044.

begun, is such a precarious moment. In the Taiwanese context, this kind of distortion may remind listeners of the once pervasive wiretapping during the dictatorship.



Since the whole song is composed of a verse-chorus-transition pattern, structurally speaking block 7 can likewise be played the same as block 4/transition 1. The replacement of folk instruments through sampling and the line insertion in block 7/transition 2 function to catch the listener's ears and to bring attention to the last block 8/chorus in which the lyrics are: "We stand here in our name / The gods bless and care for Taiwan. Ha!" The chorus thus asserts the name of Taiwan and a collective identity.

Narratively speaking, celebratory as block 7/transition 2 is, a distortion resulting from remixing sampled folk sounds also exposes the problem that arises from Chairman's zeal to represent Taiwan. Through its techniques of "selective using" and "re-using" of certain sounds, sampling connotes a precarious representation that requires linguistic and discursive justification, as was indicated in the album concept. This representation works under the precondition that the sampled sounds are framed as authentic. In the song, this presupposition is undermined by 7/transition 2, which, as just stated, connotes political manipulation. These sounds are then re-framed in 8/chorus as authentic again.

Yet even though THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN reasserts itself in this re-framing, phonic residues remain that Taiwanese familiar with religious activities cannot miss: a particular type of music that, strictly speaking, is hybrid in nature. It is characterized by religious chants intermingled with electronic pop music, played on folk instruments, through poor quality loudspeakers, performed in religious rituals, danced along to by pole-dancers, and sung along with people using karaoke devices. Such practices of electronic religious music were once denigrated, in textbooks written under the supervision of Taiwan's former ruling party KMT, as vulgar violations that would enrage the gods.¹² The association between the vulgar electronic religious

¹² The full name of the KMT party is Kuomintang of China, also known as the Nationalist Party of China. After fleeing to Taiwan in 1945, this right-wing party ruled Taiwan for decades until it lost the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2016.

music and the distortion effect by the sampler in this song is hard to escape. Indeed, Lin draws an analogy, here, between Chairman and Jeannie Hsieh (謝金燕), the icon of unashamedly vulgar Taiwanese electronic music. This is why, to Lin, Chairman misrepresents Taiwan.¹³ On the one hand reaffirming Taiwanese identity through language, while on the other distorting it through sound, *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* works as a form of self-undermining.

There is also a sinister undertone, however, lurking in the religious soundscape itself. This is aptly captured by and played with in the next song I will read: *FUNERAL*. In this context, I will pay special attention to the sound of the suona (嗩吶),¹⁴ a high pitched wind instrument, used in both *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* and *FUNERAL*.



Image of a suona¹⁵

ii.

FUNERAL – Perverting the Religious Soundscape

Compared with the simplicity of *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN*, *FUNERAL*¹⁶ is one phonic, musical, linguistic, thematic, and visual complex that proposes great difficulties for a clear-cut phonic analysis. The song title tells enough: *FUNERAL* is a funeral ceremony to be listened to and obeyed by the ones participating in it, including the listener. To unpack this song, I modified my analytical method. First, I consider how voice types contribute to the song's perversion (to which I will come back below). Second, I examine sound blocks. To better explain the functions of voice types as well as to highlight the song's ritualistic dimension, I add qualifiers to these blocks, such as "ceremonial procedures/sub-ceremonies." Finally, I explicate my analysis by considering the music video, especially the parts with explicit religious and socio-political references.

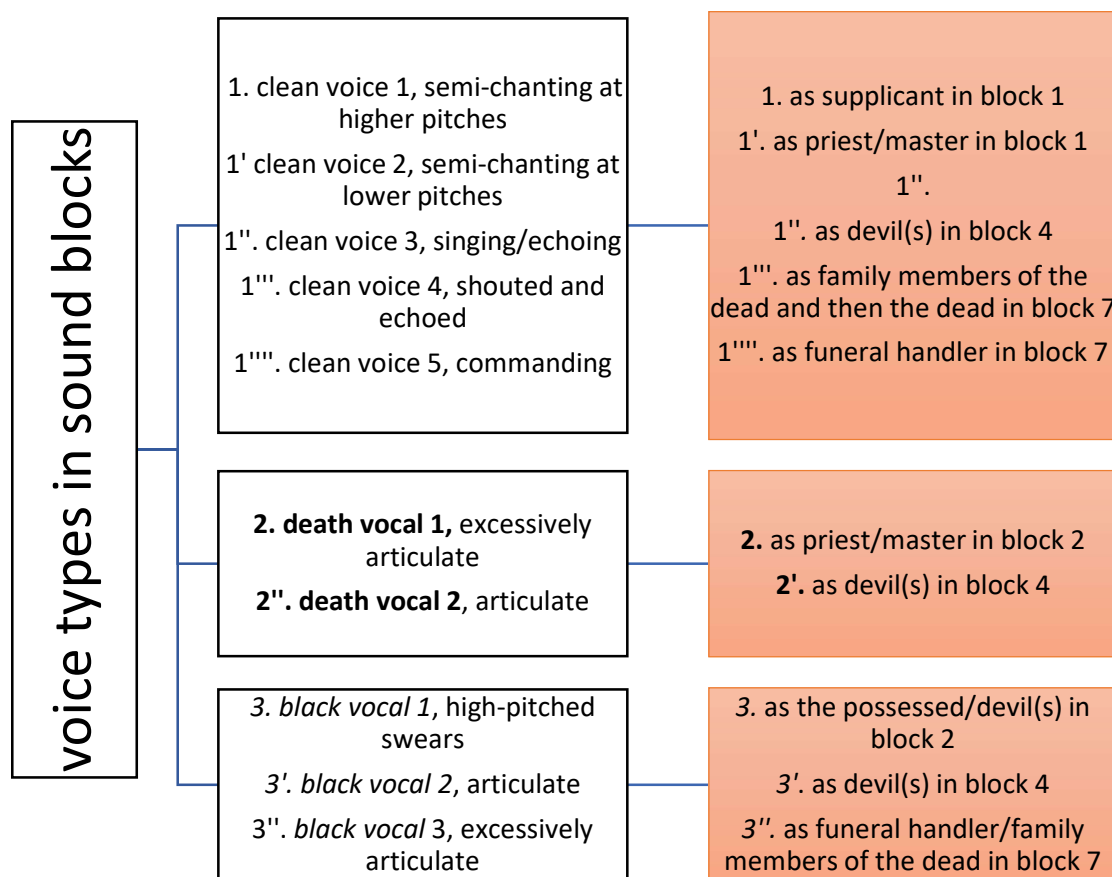
¹³ For the vulgarization of religious music, see Jeannie Hsieh's "adaption" of 大悲咒 *Nīlakaṇṭha Dhāraṇī* or *GREAT COMPASSION MANTRA*, 24 June 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWmhN6A5M64. *Electric-Techno Neon Gods* (電音三太子) is an example of radicalization of the vulgar dimension of religions in Taiwan. Chairman's live performance in the closing ceremony of the 29th Summer Universiade 2017 in Taipei, indeed, resembles *Electric-Techno Neon Gods*. For a performance of *Electric-Techno Neon Gods*, see 8 Mar. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=qanZ_rfz4bM.. For Chairman's performance, see 30 Aug. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEjRIM5-77M.

¹⁴ 台灣音樂百科辭書 *Encyclopedia of Taiwan Music* (2008), 嗩吶 "Suona," 407.

¹⁵ *Rodo*, 14 Sept. 2006, reader.rodo.com/pk4993/archives/2145986.html.

¹⁶ *FUNERAL*. 8 June 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rN7yhDI1cuk. I try to preserve the vulgar and often cursing and swearing Taiwanese in my translation. I also preserve the English words in the lyrics.

The gist of FUNERAL lies in its use of a dazzling amount of voice types that all speak and participate in the FUNERAL ceremony. Below I first list the voice types and their beginning personas.

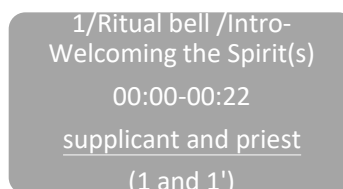


Before I move on to the sound blocks and explain the above "voice/persona map," two general tips for the analyst/listener:

- During the song, these voices and personas form several pairs that interact and substitute each other.
- The extremity and perversion of FUNERAL lies not so much in its heavy and intense singing, but rather in how the thematic connotations of a funeral, parallels vocal interactions and substitutions.

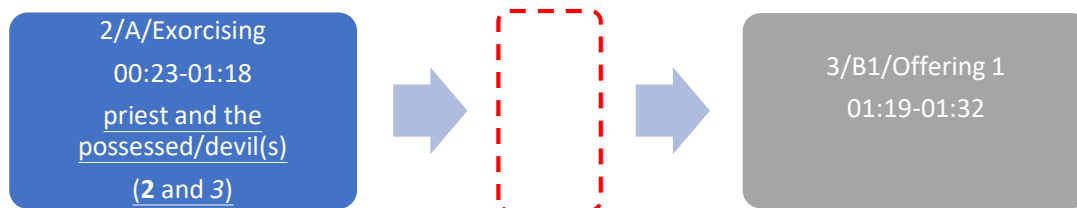
In the following discussion, I notate these pairs and explain their interactions block by block. Opened by drumbeats sounding like a march, block 1 introduces a sense of urgency. As indicated by a single sound of the traditional religious bell this musical introduction also functions to open a religious ceremony, commonly known as welcoming the spirit(s) (恭迎) in

Taiwan.¹⁷ The reason why a ceremony is urgently needed is explained by the conversation between a supplicant and a priest. In scheme:



The semi-chanting at higher pitches (1) sounds a bit hysterical. This chants states that a friend has lost his or her mind, and asks the “Master” for help. In contrast, the Master, semi-chanting in lower pitches (1’), sounds calm. Resolutely, the Master proclaims and launches an exorcising ritual (作法).¹⁸

2/A, as the priest proclaims, contains the exorcising act (作法). The priest, now using an emphatic death vocal (2) orders the devil(s) to leave in excessively articulate but filthy language. In return, the devil(s) echo the priest, and defiantly swear “shit” in a high-pitched black vocal (3). Notably, in 2/A, all the priest does is curse in the name of the Jade Emperor (玉皇大帝), and as such he is not much different from the swearing devil(s). Unsurprisingly, then, starting at 01:05, something goes awry. The death vocal (2) declares itself to be a “demonic alien monster,” with the “super power” of both mind-reading and soul-grabbing.¹⁹ Here the devil(s) have taken over this voice. This suggests that they have possessed the priest. Schematically it looks like this (and note that there is a red rectangular to which I will return):



For those familiar with the rituals, block 3/B1 must connote the offerings (獻禮), and in conformity with this, the sounds are more balanced, similar to the musical arrangement previously associated with the priest/Master. Yet if B1 sounds less heavy, after an intensive but topsy turvy exorcising ritual, this may also suggest that 3/B1 functions as the first ceremonial

¹⁷ For terms, backgrounds, and explanations of religious ceremonies in Taiwan, readers are highly recommended to consult “Taiwanese Culture (1/03)” on 西方與東方的巧遇 *Taiwan Style*, 25 Feb. 2017, acidophilus.blogspot.com/2017/02/taiwanese-culture-1-of.html. Even when the funeral is not listed here, its generally practiced procedures (sub-ceremonies) can be found in descriptions of these ceremonies, especially the one about Ghost Festival 中元節. It should be noted that this festival is often untranslatable, as Times Three (the blogger) explains in footnotes 9 and 10: “This section is even worse than that bit about the ‘Lords of the Three Realms.’ Rather than drowning in a sea of Taoist terminology, I’ve left some of this vague” and “There is really no good way to translate this term [搶孤] in English.”

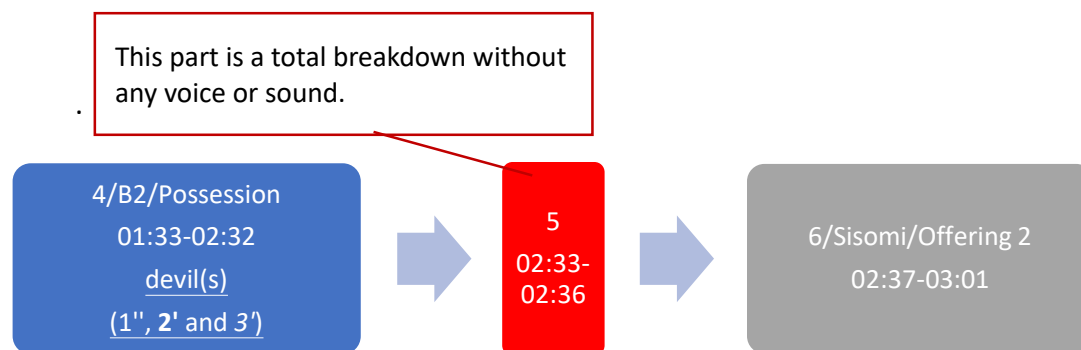
¹⁸ This proclamation is: “你朋友中邪 現在來還不遲 先來 佈陣 準備 做法 Your friend is possessed. Not too late. Come, lineup, prepare, and exorcize!”

¹⁹ The lines are: “外星魔仔 妖力超強 還有絕招 super power / 一下要讀你的心 一下控制你的魂 I’m the demonic alien monster with super power / I read your mind and take your soul.”

offering and a repose for devil(s).

Continuing the prolonged, distorted guitar note at the end of 3/B1 (01:32-01:34), when the devil(s) has taken over the death vocal, 4/B2 can be considered a possession. This reading is supported by an examination of the death and black vocals, now both articulate and of equal importance. At 01:33-01:47, one devil, in the death vocal (2'), declares that it intends to take revenge, and emphasizes that there is no escaping from its vengeance. Chiming in, another devil screams "no escaping" in black vocal (3'). At 01:48-02:32, this devil (3') screams the Taoist invocation "hail heaven and hell" (天靈靈地靈靈), audibly paralleled or also chimed by the guitar. What follows this invocation, however, is pretty sinister. This devil offers a discount on funerals, an offer that is described as "perfect," by the singing clean voice 3 (1').

Then there is a total musical breakdown at 02:33-02:36, a complete silence. This was, in hindsight, already preempted in the transition from 01:18-01:19. Yet here it is radical. I read this in the following way: from rituals or sub-ceremonies of exorcizing and possession, the song has become a funeral *itself*. This is confirmed when the peaceful "sisomi," commonly heard funeral music in Taiwan, starts at 02:37-03:01.²⁰ In scheme:



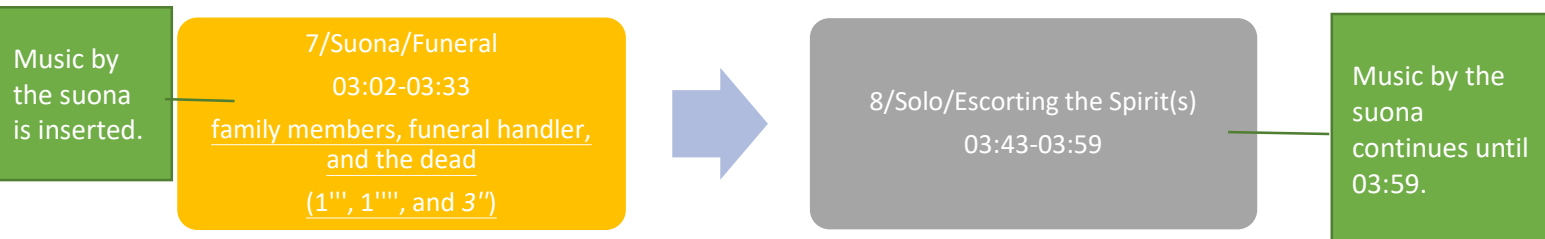
With the high-pitched suona at 03:03, also a familiar funeral dirge in Taiwan, block 7 starts the climax of the song and funeral *per se*. In line with its ceremonial significance, block 7 is the most intense, and vocally the most complex. In an excessively articulate ritualistic language, a funeral handler screams (3') and commands the family members of the dead to "cry out." This command is immediately obeyed, collectively "cried out" at 03:16. Although after the collective cry, the main voice type is still the black vocal in the line "remember to call from hell," the speakers now appear to be family members.²¹ The vocal substitution, from the handler to family members, is followed by more substitutions that can only be termed a collective possession, with many voices speaking indistinctly in shouting and echoing clean voices 4 (1'). Take, for example, the line "dress warm." In everyday conversation, this phrase expresses affection and care; in the context of a funeral, however, it makes little sense, and is instead deeply unsettling. Following this phrase, there is another everyday reminder: "Let me know whatever you want," only that in a funeral this is addressed to the dead to ask if the offering is satisfactory. Perhaps,

²⁰ Sisomi means the combinations of notes of C, G, E. It is a Taiwanese pidgin referring to westernized music, often negatively connoted.

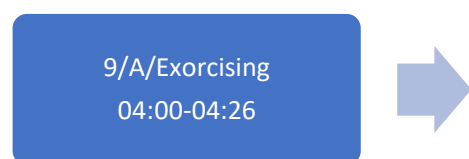
²¹ "獻花 獻果 / 請家屬來三磕首 哭 / 一人一束花 每朵帶思念 / 回去要記得打電話 Serve the flowers and fruits! / Family members come to knock your heads and cry out! / A funeral wreath memorizing the dead / Remember to call from hell."

the resulting collective perversion is why the funeral handler commands “sisomi, play the music” (1'''), to escort the spirit(s) of the dead (恭送).²²

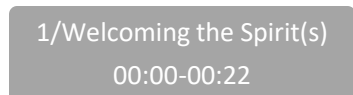
In block 8 during which the suona continues the funeral music, the guitar solo begins. This association between metal “empowerment” and funeral music is in fact already implied in 7; starting at 03:18, shortly after the collective cry out, there is a clear phonic resemblance between the distorted guitar and the high-pitched suona. The guitar solo, then, becomes yet another form of funeral music for the dead. By now, it is very clear that FUNERAL is about playing with and acting out how funeral ceremonies can be practiced in malicious manners.²³ In scheme:



With the suona fading out at 03:59, the funeral *per se* (blocks 7 and 8) has ended. Still, this FUNERAL, this series of exorcising-possession-funeral, is far from ending. My reading is supported here by two considerations. First, at the level of the sound blocks as sub-ceremonies, block 9 returns to A, which was used in 2/exorcising, and especially the music from 04:00-04:26, which is the same as in 00:23-00:36, but double in length. Second, FUNERAL starts with a marching rhythm and 1/Taoist bell and this marching rhythm comes back at the end. In terms of a religious soundscape, this is almost like an allusion to the music of god marches (9/coda) in THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN.

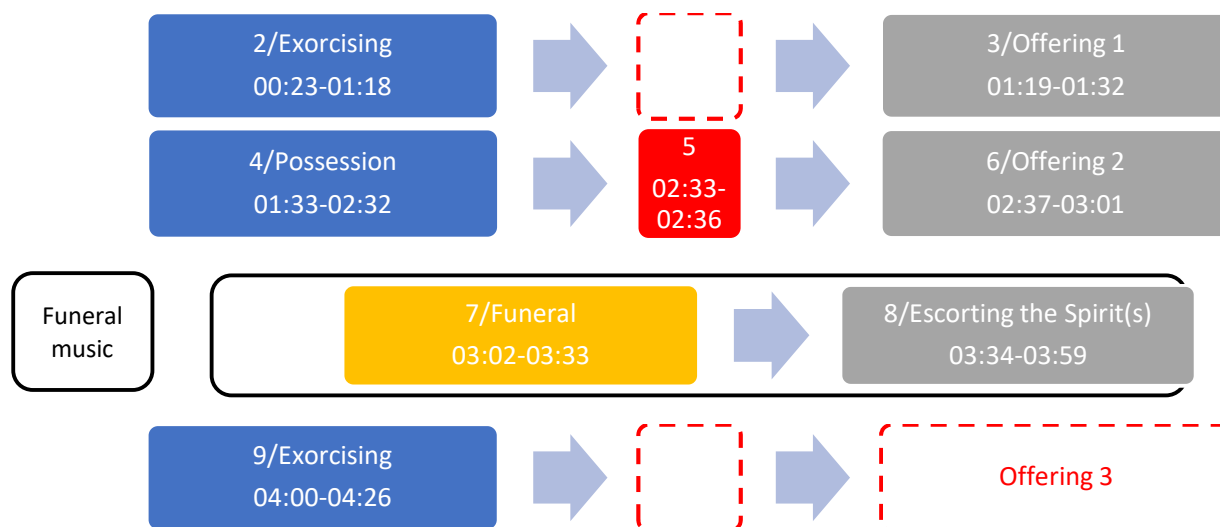


Thematically speaking, those familiar with Taoist rituals and ceremonies can immediately notice that the third offering is missing and grasp that this FUNERAL must go on, that it must, in a sense, march forward, until the minimum amount of offering is met. This is why below I present the song’s “flow chart,” with a red box that makes clear that FUNERAL has not properly ended in light of funeral conventions.



²² “晚上的風吹來冷吱吱 / 厚的外套別忘記 / 想要什麼就說別客氣 / Sisomi 奏樂 It’s so chilly at midnight / Dress warm / Let me know whatever you want / Sisomi, play the music!”

²³ This is aptly captured and portrayed in black humor in the critically-acclaimed Taiwanese film 父後七日 *Seven Days in Heaven* (2010).



FUNERAL, then, is a vicious spiral that moves from exorcising to possession to a funeral without a proper ending, and perhaps will go on and on. What propels this spiral are the numerous voices and personas, all speaking, interacting and substituting, or better: exorcising and possessing each other. This interpretation is supported by the music video, especially its portrayal of the vocalist who is supposed to be the center for the viewer's identification. During 2/exorcising, for instance, his dress references a *Matrix*-resident and his gestures echo a *Godzilla* action, whereas the lyrics tell us that he is an alien-demon-monster. What we see is how he is destroying buildings of civilization, but his gesture of chasing away demons resembles an exorcising act of a Taoist priest. The tall building that is being destroyed in the music video is the Shin Kong Life Tower (新光人壽保險摩天大樓), the headquarters of the Japanese Shin Kong Corporation with its departments of Life Insurance, Financial Holding, and also with the Mitsukoshi Department Store owned by that Corporation. I read this as a critique of corporate capitalism. The pig mask the singer consequently puts on in block 3/offering 1 and block 4/possession is a common sight in extreme metal. Yet, the references to pork as a common offering and the Taiwanese sacrificial "pig god" (豬公) are impossible to miss.²⁴ The corruption of religious rituals by capitalist elements is also evident in block 4's highly headbangable music, which is set in a visual frame that combines disco and a sci-fi background, and the band members performing and dancing along like typical Taiwanese ecstatic evil spirits (群魔亂舞). Finally, during block 7/funeral the vocalist and other band members appear as funeral handlers.

²⁴ For information about sacrificial rituals of pig god in Taiwan, see 13 Feb. 2016, news.ltn.com.tw/news/life/breakingnews/1601338.



Screenshot of the band members dressing as funeral handlers, with a background of white stripes, funeral lotus, and hands of the gods²⁵

Here, the vocalist is not only a funeral handler whose command brings in further forms of demonic possession, but he is also a performance conductor—an all-in-one Master, that is also, according to the lyrics an alien-demon-monster with superpowers. This is indicated in the music video at 04:01-04:14, showing the vocalist wildly gesturing in rotating and the zooming in and out of the camera shots. A little later he is revealed to be a deadly ghost, with shining demonic eyes, at 04:17-04:26. I read the subordination of the Western guitar to the traditional suona in blocks 6, 7, and 8 as meaningful. Reading the Western guitar as an allegory of Western capitalism, I consider this subordination a form of critique.

While *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* is generally accepted as a song embodying the representational soundscape of Taiwan, *FUNERAL* is the perverse side of what that soundscape celebrates. Above I stated that a “sonorous cosmology is central to religious diversity and tolerance in Taiwan, and advocates traditional values enabling the Taiwanese to find a middle course, balancing between the traditional and the modern.” In my reading of *FUNERAL*, its perversity suggests that the encouraging of tolerance, or the notion of the middle course and balance, may end up in complying with politico-economic exploitation. Even in *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN*, as I pointed out earlier, there are phonic moments when what is forgotten in the representational soundscape emerges and is remembered as vulgar. In *FUNERAL*, what is ignored and forgotten, or what is left out in the name of balance, returns as chants, cries, shouts, and screams. These voices all take part in, but are also trapped in vicious circles of exorcising-possession-funeral, of life-and-death. They connote the larval and spectral, to use Agamben’s description of the human subject trapped in the deadlock of contemporary biopolitics. The powers of life and death return in the white banners, pulled out by the hands of the gods in the music video, that play with a well-known Taiwanese proverb. Whereas the proverb as commonly known goes “life and death are destined; prosperity belongs to decisions of gods” (生死有命富貴在天), the banners in the above image twists this into: “Life and death are

²⁵ 8 June 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rN7yhDI1cuk.

destined; only gods know why we live and die” (生死有命命有生死).

iii.

Voices Unprofanable

The two songs provoke me to again bring metal into a, this time critical, dialogue with philosophy. In my reading the songs highlight an internal rupture of the sacred-religious that Agamben neglects or even oppresses. To make my argument clear I will first consider the internal rupture at stake in the Taiwanese context by focusing on some intersections between the two songs. These will then help me to critically examine Agamben's strategic definition of the sacred and his advocacy of profanation.

To really understand *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* and *FUNERAL* some clarifications about Taiwanese religious traditions are needed. In line with the traditional cosmology of all beings, in the Taiwanese polytheist context, there is no strict division between not-human entities, but more a spectrum of often overlapping and shifting spirits of all sorts. This fluid spectrum of spirits is central to both songs. *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* invokes four deities in a row in the opening verse.²⁶ Similarly, but more maliciously, *FUNERAL* invokes and substitutes several devils-dead-gods that all end up in an indistinctive mingling of entities. On the one hand, this cosmology of beings and spirits of all sorts allows for a freer, or even improper, use of religious elements. It is in this context that the perversion of *FUNERAL* is not so much disrupting as playful, channeling violence so that the Taiwanese can continue their cycle(s) of life and death. On the other hand, even with this general religious freedom, there are certain elements that cannot be used without disturbing people.

One element of this kind marks the first intersection between the two songs—the suona, the folk musical instrument used in almost all religious rituals in Taiwan, is famous and notorious for the way its high-pitched loudness stands out from other sounds. In *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN*, the suona is the only folk instrument not sampled in block 7 and thus spared from the danger of vulgarization. In *FUNERAL*, the funeral music played by the suona is the most dominant sound in blocks 7 and 8 and, in a sense, “possesses” the metal guitar. What is so special about the suona is that its religious/funeral music can be dramatized and perverted, but not violated in vulgarization. Similar to the Jewish shofar in which Mladen Dolar hears the voice of the Father-God and the cry of the dying primal father (53-54), there exists a phonic unconsciousness in the sound of the suona that cannot be heard without remembering violence. The sonorous cosmology of all beings entails that the high-pitched suona stands for all beings that may be dead but are still there, or *here*, existing, speaking together, in incomprehensible manners.

The second intersection of the two songs is the 18th Jade Emperor, Guan Yu 關羽, a figure that consecrates beings of all sorts and who wields power doubly in being both good and bad. This figure, so go the tales, was a general serving a warlord who was beheaded in a malicious way and only buried properly later. He then became the red-faced underworld god. Even

²⁶ The deities are Buddha 佛祖, Mazu 媽祖, Guan Yu 關羽, and Tudigong 土地公. In the Taiwanese context, a Buddha designates both deities in general as well as the Gautama Buddha, founder of Buddhism. Mazu is the goddess of the sea and the merciful guardian of sailors, Tudigong is a low-ranked Lord of the soil and ground, and the protector of communities.

nowadays, Guan Yu is also worshipped as the god of justice and retribution in Taiwan. Guan Yu exists as a devil, an underworld god, but also as a celestial god, and embodies both the just and the ferocious, benevolence and the horrifying aspects of sovereignty. Guan Yu's fierce loyalty (義氣) can be invoked to create a bond between the Taiwanese (THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN) but also to chase away devils (FUNERAL). However, he cannot be used for vulgar religious activities and entertainment. This is especially so in the Taiwanese political context when Guan Yu is mobilized as a symbol for patriotism, but also stood for, and still stands for, all the Taiwanese that were persecuted and slaughtered during the dictatorship.

The sound of the suona is the musical equivalent of the latter, of the Taiwanese speaking through the mouth of Guan Yu to demand justice and retribution. This is not only a haunting, frightening, phonic unconsciousness. It also highlights two important points. Though Guan Yu was killed *improperly*, he became an underworld god and celestial being nonetheless. Second, people whose bare life was taken, need not be dead. This helps me to now read Agamben critically, whose advocacy of profanation as a (bio)political task was central to the previous chapter.

For Agamben, the sacrificial rite that was once exemplary of profanation has been dismantled by a machine of the unprofanable, since the political and capitalist secularization of Christianity has separated everything to the extent that acts of profanation are either neutralized or nullified, and have become no more than episodic spectacles. The (bio)political task in the domain of religion, Agamben then argues, is the profanation of the unprofanable (*Profanations* 81-87, 91-92). Provocative as this argument may be, it raises the question of how the unprofanable can be profaned. As Agamben suggests but never specifies, the unprofanable is the bare life that can be killed but not sacrificed. Put straightforwardly, for improper bare life to be profaned, it first needs to become "proper," that is, to be somehow restored to the realm of the sacred. The implication is that, one way or another, this life will be killed, at least symbolically, if not physically.

Symptomatic of his tendency to seek out a pure ground or origin, Agamben traces the Christian divine-human division back to the ancient Roman division of the sacred versus the profane. He acknowledges that the term *sacred* was used by the Romans to designate two conflicting components. In the domain of gods, *sacred* designated the celestial as opposed to the religious-underworld gods. In the domain of the human, *sacred* designated the augustus consecrated to the gods, and not the cursed excluded from the community. Agamben subsumes the religious under the sacred. He defines the sacred as "sacred or religious . . . things that in some way belonged to the gods." And he defines the profane as "once sacred or religious . . . returned to the use and property of men." He then goes on to establish a Roman-Christian celestial-sacred-divine ground upon which his biopolitical critique is built (73-79). Only based on this celestial-sacred-divine ground can the obscure argument "profanation of the unprofanable" start to make sense.

This does not work in the Taiwanese case, or in relation to Taiwanese metal. To be sure, profanation has often been related to metal in general. For instance, commenting on the themes of the occult and of Satanism, Kahn-Harris, points out that metal's pursuit of transgression is religiously connoted, and often functions like rituals for people to leash out anti-Christian sentiments as a form of profanation (*Extreme Metal* 35-37). If there were to be such a thing as profanation of the unprofanable it would be the legendary Norwegian black

metal violence that Phillipov dealt with in “Extreme Music for Extreme People.”²⁷ The church burnings and murders can be read as a perverse realization of a profanation of the unprofanable. Yet in the case of both THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN and FUNERAL, the songs remain informed by traditional Taiwanese religions where the very distinction between proper and improper, or between life and death do not exist as such. Put differently: the unprofanable is a common experience for the Taiwanese, as a result of which profanity loses its political edge.

My interest in the two religiously themed songs and my discussion about the phonic unconsciousness of the suona is not intended to demonstrate the obvious fact that metal music is a means through which religions take part in politics. My intention is rather to highlight that beings, memories, and histories speak to Taiwanese audiences through soundscapes, and that soundscapes, in harboring a phonic unconsciousness, are politico-ethically charged. This phonic unconsciousness will be the focus of the next section. Having temporarily “grounded” myself by listening to the familiar, representational, sacred-religious soundscape of Taiwan, I will now move to the voices and sounds from “the underground.”

2.

Metal and Historical Dissonances

Music . . . lays down the tracks of an audio unconsciousness that, while it connects at certain points with the unconsciousness supposed to be structured like a language, operates differently.
(Wilson, “From Forest Unknown” 152)

In the previous section, I explained the role soundscapes play in rethinking Taiwanese metal. I also brought attention to the phonic unconsciousness carried in and through the sound of the suona, and explained how Taiwanese music evokes this unconsciousness for quite different purposes. In addition to the suona, Taiwanese metal also uses other voices and sounds to deal with traumatic histories and memories and to alternatively construe forms of Taiwanese identity. In this section, I want to approach some other examples of phonic unconsciousness by examining two songs: JUST NOT MEANT TO BE 還君明珠 (花殤 *Elegy for the Blossoms*, 2015) by the Taiwanese folk metal band Crescent Lament (恆月三途) and SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT 破夜斬 (武德 *Bú-Tik*, 2013) by the Taiwanese symphonic/black/death/folk metal band Chthonic (閃靈). By focusing on the folk sounds used in the two songs, I will consider how a certain phonic unconsciousness is appropriated by the two bands for different purposes. I will elaborate how this phonic unconsciousness supports or undermines the bands’ attempts to give voice to Taiwan’s troubled past.

i.

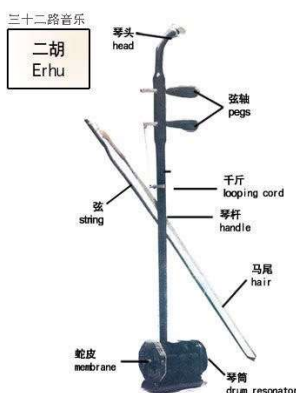
Scarred Histories and Memories in JUST NOT MEANT TO BE

²⁷ My sincerest gratitude to Yasco Horsman for pointing out the distinction between the celestial gods and the underworld gods and the link between the religious and the Norwegian black metal scenes.

JUST NOT MEANT TO BE²⁸ tells a love story in a turbulent time. Since this story is a meta-narrative frame tying together levels of voices and sounds, the lyrics, and the music video, I quote it in full as given by the band:

In 1942, A-hiong encountered a young entrepreneur, Bîng-hong. During the troubled times, the two, who had strong feelings for each other, considered each other as the soul mate. Leaving for Japan for business in 1943, Bîng-hong bade a tearful farewell to A-hiong, promising he would return in a year to marry her. However, as the war situation deteriorated for Japan, and with the dominant presence of US submarines in waters between Taiwan and Japan, attacking vessels, Bîng-hong had no choice but to stay in Japan a little longer. Without knowing when would see her loved one return, amid rapid changes in the political situation, A-hiong accepted the arrangements by the madam to marry to a rich man as his concubine in 1946. On the eve of the wedding, Bîng-hong suddenly appeared, explaining to her that, he was trapped in Japan, and was only able to return to Taiwan after the war. However, the reunion was too late for A-hiong, holding Bîng-hong's hands, A-hiong lamented that she had nothing left for him but tears, and prayers that they may find each other again in the next life.²⁹

The story does not end well, with the protagonists eventually engulfed by the torrents of history. In a sense, the story is melodramatic and cliché, similar to those told by the elderly to a younger Taiwanese generation. Cliché as this story is, however, JUST NOT MEANT TO BE also gives voice to troubled histories and memories of Taiwan. These memories, or scars, are vocalised through the insertion of the musical instruments erhu (二胡) and pipa (琵琶), both of which evoke a phonic unconsciousness that is shared by many Taiwanese people.



²⁸ JUST NOT MEANT TO BE. 25 Aug. 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMJXlit_JKl.

The original lyrics are characteristic of a Geisha (known in Taiwan as Getoa) singing style full of metaphoric and metonymic images and less concerned with a plot or one subject. My translation attempts to preserve the images and does not follow all grammatical rules. The official English lyrics, a "translation" re-telling the story, can be found in the Appendix.

²⁹ Ibid.

Image of an erhu³⁰Image of a pipa³¹

Commonly heard, listened to, learned, and played, the erhu and pipa are generally accepted as instruments that stand for Taiwan. In addition to these folk instruments, the insertion of the piano and the dialogue between the female protagonist and her lover are also of special interest. The piano was introduced to Taiwan by the Catholic and Christian missionaries in the late 19th century, but it was only during the Japanese colonial period (when practices of Western music were already established in Japan) that it became common. The pipa is an ancient instrument traceable to approximately 220 BC and is played in Eastern Asia, including China and Japan. The history of the erhu is more ambiguous. Introduced to China between the 7th and 10th centuries from what is nowadays central Asia, this two-stringed instrument is especially popular in southern China, but when and how it was introduced to Taiwan remains a mystery.³² Through the instruments, the song expresses a historical complex. To unpack this complex, I will proceed in the following ways: I first examine how these sounds (from the erhu, the pipa, and the piano) unite the song. I then discuss their phonic unconsciousness by examining the sound blocks. Finally, I pay attention to the music video.

Although JUST NOT MEANT TO BE sounds simple and gives an impression of being “cut, copied, and pasted together,” in comparison to the other songs discussed in this chapter, this song is the one most resistant to analysis. Before I move on to details, it is helpful to have an overview of the song’s structure. Below, I divide the song into two cycles.

³⁰ *Yueqi baike*, 25 Aug. 2014, yueqi.baike.com/article-290502.html.

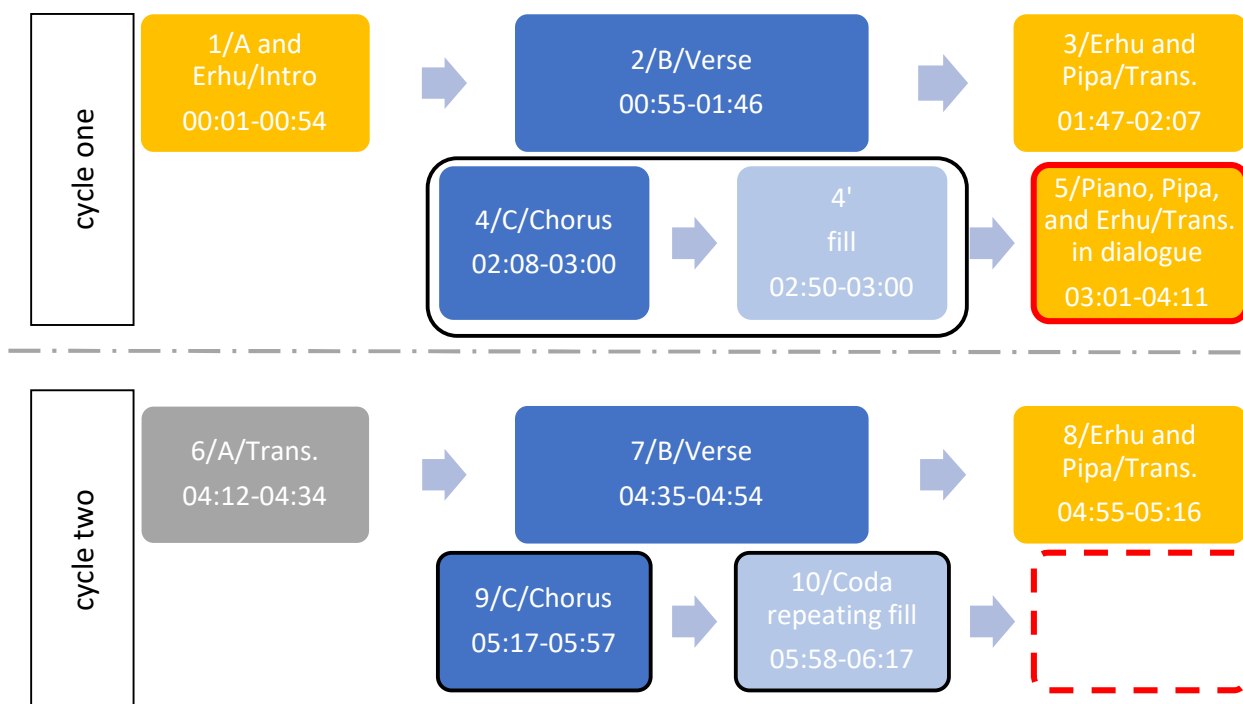
³¹ 台灣 *Word*, 10 Sept. 2013,

www.twword.com/wiki/%E3%80%8A%E7%90%B5%E7%90%B6%E6%9B%B2%E3%80%8B.

³² 台灣音樂百科辭書 *Encyclopedia of Taiwan Music* (2008), 琵琶 “Pipa” 363-67, 二絃 “Erxian” (aka erhu), 225; 鋼琴教育 “Gangqin Jiayu” (“Education of Piano”) 554-56.

For cross-developments between the pipa, the yueqin (in *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* and *SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT*), and the sanxian 三弦 (in *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN*) in the Tang dynasty, see 為傳統獻聲：臺灣傳統樂器 *Traditional Musical Instruments In Taiwan* (2001) by Chui-kuan Lu (呂鍾寬), 93-94. For the relationship between the erhu/erxian, the sanxian, and the huqin 胡琴 (an archetypal stringed instrument from which the erhu and the sanxian develop) in the Song and Yuan dynasties, see Lu 94-96. For a resource in English, see the *Britannica Academic*, especially the sections on foreign influence in the Han and Tang dynasties (applicable to the pipa and the yueqin), and the popularization of folk theaters in the Song and Yuan dynasties (applicable to the erhu), academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Chinese-music/399706. Note that the histories and origins of folk instruments like the erhu and the yueqin are still under debate.

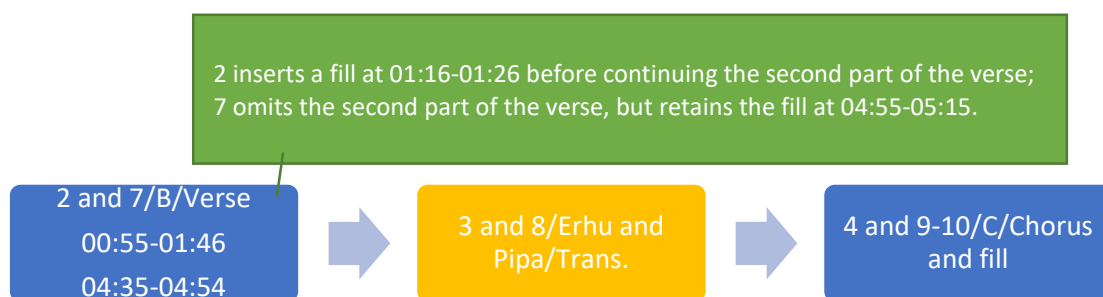
For the establishment of practices of Western music in Japan since the mid-19th century, see “State Ceremony and Music in Meiji-era Japan” (2013) by Yasuko Tsukahara. For the introduction of the piano in Taiwan, see Chapter Seven in 台灣西方文明初體驗 *Taiwan’s Encounter with the West* (2005) by Rou-jin Chen (陳柔縉).



Two general observations can be derived from the above. First, the song's structure is simple but atypically repetitive but incomplete. In addition to its lack of a guitar solo, its atypicality also comes from block 5, an unusual transitional block in which a dialogue between the female narrator and her lover (A-hiong and Bîng-hong in the above quoted story) takes place. The incompleteness is detectable in block 10, which concludes the song by repeating a structurally ambiguous fill (in cycle one, indicated as 4' and marked in the color of light blue); in other words, 10 (also in the color of light blue) can also be considered as a part of 9/chorus, as such implying that cycle two is missing a final block or element. Second, the transitional blocks where the folk instruments are used are almost half the length of the primary blocks; compared to the static meta-oriented primary blocks, these transitional blocks sound more dynamic. That is to say, the gist and center of *JUST NOT MEANT TO BE* lies in how the erhu and the pipa deliver wordless messages in these transitional blocks, and these messages are elaborated by other elements and on other levels.

1/A and Erhu/Intro
00:01-00:54 -- 00:33-00:54

The opening of *JUST NOT MEANT TO BE* already gives a clue to the phonic unconsciousness harbored in and through the sound of the erhu. The erhu is here associated with metal heaviness. Block 1 first introduces the chunky A characteristic of prolonged and distorted riffs, accentuated by prolonged erhu notes at 00:33-00:54. Though not heavy in terms of sound quality, the erhu denotes an emotional heaviness. Despite slight differences, both cycles can be summed as repetitions of a metal-erhu pattern.

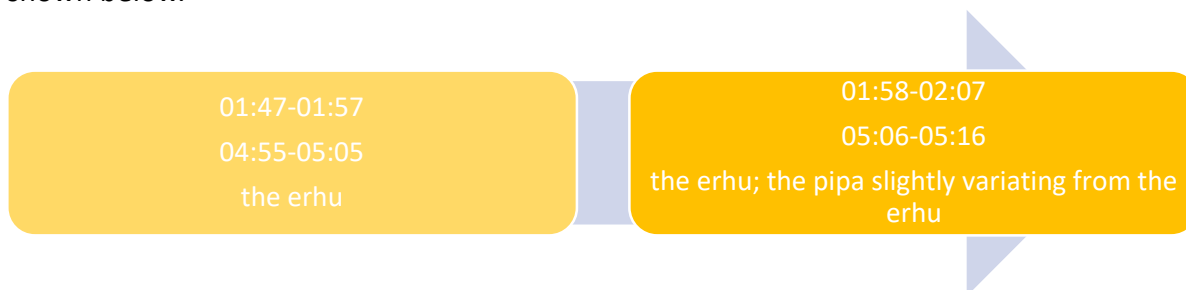


Central to the repetitions of this pattern is also the accentuation of voices, wordless messages, and sounds. The fills at 01:16-01:26 and 04:55-05:15, for example, consist of synchronized chunky riffs, cymbals, and bassdrum beats. In C, following the erhu in 3 and 8/transitions, the metal elements are subordinated to the female vocal, their distortion often paralleling the singing voice. I read the erhu's emotional heaviness in relation to the female narrator of this song/story. The instrument speaks for her, expressing her wordless inner voice. This reading is supported by 5/transition where the dialogue is followed by an erhu solo, instead of a guitar solo. I unpack block 5 as follows:

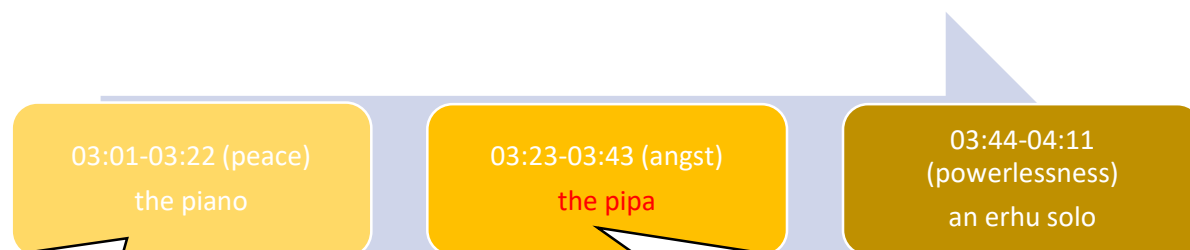


Notably, after the 30 seconds-long erhu solo in block 5, the storytelling in cycle two is fractured—part of the verse in 7 is omitted, and the song concludes with a fill in block 10. This is a form of repetitive, but incoherent and incomplete, storytelling, as though the story is too heavy to be fully recounted. Whereas in metal a solo is usually considered empowering, the effect of the erhu solo here is quite the opposite. The female narrator has no power to stand against larger political and historical tides, such as the offensives between the US and Japan in the song's story. The phonic unconsciousness of the erhu, thus, indexes heaviness as powerlessness.

Let me now consider the phonic unconsciousness of the pipa by examining the two ways the pipa is used. Notably, in both blocks 3 and 8, the pipa is subordinated to the erhu, as is shown below.



The pipa echoes the erhu by repeating and slightly varying the erhu's melodic lines. I read this echoing in the context of the sonorous cosmos of beings, which would be a common reading in Taiwan. The two instruments together connote a collective inner voice, wordless, but not alone. In the light of the song's story, the erhu and the pipa are the "voice" for the protagonists who have no control over their fates. Indeed, in this song, the pipa is also used for the song's dramatic build up, such as in 5/transition that accompanies the dialogue. Below I add the dialogue and dramatic functions of the piano, the pipa, and the erhu in block 5.



Man: I, I am back.
 Woman: Finally. I thought I wouldn't see you again.
 Man: How have you been all these years?
 Woman: The mama-san made a trade with Mr. Lin. I will be settled in his mansion **next month**.

Man: That rich old man? You are going to be his concubine?
 Woman: At least I won't be dying alone as a wandering ghost.
 Man: It's all my fault. I should have been back earlier.
 Woman: You're too late. The fate has played a terrible joke on us. Maybe we are just not meant to be together.

While the tranquil piano suggests that the female narrator does enjoy a moment of peacefulness, even happiness, in finally being reunited with her lover, this moment is all too brief. When she informs her lover that she has settled for becoming a concubine, the pipa appears, much more distorted than in transitions 3 and 8, and is echoed by a distorted guitar. The distorted pipa is associated with how the fates of the protagonists—and by implication, the Taiwanese—are distorted because of larger political tides. This reading is supported by the phrase "wandering ghost," which is an intertextual reference to the lonely pipa-playing female figures in several Chinese literary and musical works, earlier referred to in 2/verse at 01:26-01:47 through the line "playing pipa alone in coldness." The erhu and the pipa, then, evoke a phonic unconsciousness that indexes a collective powerlessness, as all are subjected to external, oppressive powers. The phonic unconsciousness of the erhu and the pipa tap into the destitute existence of the Taiwanese, individual as well as collective, their beings fractured and incomplete.

Arguably, Crescent Lament's choice to subordinate metal elements to the erhu and the pipa carries a wordless message. For many Taiwanese people who grow up used to these folk voices and sounds, as well as these kinds of stories, *JUST NOT MEANT TO BE* cannot be listened to without a sense of ambivalence and pressing anxiety. What do the young Taiwanese do with these stories, traumatic histories and memories that were once unspeakable in public due to the KMT's anti-Japanese propaganda? They consider these stories as somewhat (melo)dramatic, incoherent, and incomplete. Yet they may be confronted with an even more pressing doubt, concerning other stories that are omitted and forgotten. How do they know if they can ever

remember them? There is no answer to these doubts, just like these stories have no conclusive endings, but are repeated again and again in history, lived and experienced by the Taiwanese of past and present, as if being a Taiwanese is also a “terrible joke by fate.”

This attitude toward Taiwan’s scarred histories and memories is reflected in the song’s linguistic and cultural hybridity. *JUST NOT MEANT TO BE* is sung in mixed Mandarin and Taiwanese, imitating the singing style of a Japanese Geisha, and the lyrics are a mixture of classical Chinese literature (especially Sung Ci [宋詞]) and Japanese Haiku. The music video abounds in references to Japanese cultures. It also comments on the tormented existence of living this hybridity by using shots where musicians constantly split and reconfigure, as shown below.



An example of constantly splitting and reconfiguring musicians, and a visual reference to Japanese culture, also legible as a journey searching for identity³³

Aside from the realistic representation of the female protagonist, the music video is composed of four visual frames. The sequence of these frames has a particular meaning. In the first frame, the illustrated background and reference to the ukiyo-e *The Wave* suggests that the song is also a sea journey that, as made clear by the second frame shown above, is a journey about split identity. The third frame, with a near blank background except for a few decorative leaves, appears ambivalent towards this split and confused hybrid identity. In contrast, the final frame, which starts with the erhu solo, is unmistakably emotionally heavy. Set in darkness, close shots of the musicians only reveal their performing bodies; similarly, the face of the female vocalist who is the female protagonist is only vaguely recognizable, and does not appear to be a stable center of identification. The music video, in brief, is an exploration of hybrid identity, involving torment and blankness, and ending in darkness. The final, closing shot is of the female protagonist standing by the sea, gradually fading away into a black screen—washed away by torrents of history.

³³ 25 Aug. 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMJXlit_JKl.



Ending shot of JUST NOT MEANT TO BE³⁴

The weight of scarred memories and histories combined with a continued struggle for an identity shows itself in the music video's visual incongruity. The female vocalist is in a kimono and the black metal style keyboardist is headbanging in corpse paint. Also, there is the industrial metal style guitarist, the bassist (in mask), and the erhu player. As there is no answer to the questions they raise, the band makes fun of itself—in by no means light-hearted melodramatization. If history's weight is unbearable—a terrible joke by fate—one can only respond with jokes. Yet, underlying this dry laughter and bad humor is a dim hope that, by continuing the journey and the story, we might still be able to rewrite the ending.

ii.

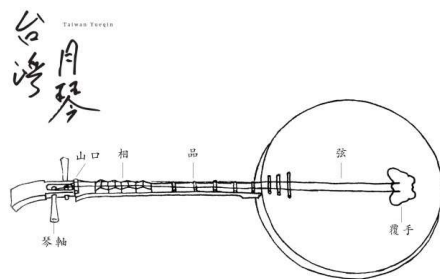
A Blood Sacrifice in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT

The phonic unconsciousness played out by the erhu and pipa in JUST NOT MEANT TO BE, as discussed above, gives voices to the manifold scarred histories and memories of Taiwan in an ambivalent manner. If, as I suggested, these folk sounds stand for the emotional heaviness that come with traumatic events and the powerlessness of the Taiwanese, the phonic unconsciousness is given a dramatic twist in Chthonic's SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT³⁵ which uses the erhu and the yueqin (月琴) and, moreover, refers to a non-existent piano.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT. 10 June 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=3siP7Ta4ivY.

³⁶ The yueqin is a stringed instrument, most commonly with four strings, that differs from the pipa. *Encyclopedia of Taiwan Music*, 月琴 "Yueqin" 470. The yueqin used in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT is two-stringed.

Image of a yueqin³⁷Image of a Taiwanese two-stringed yueqin³⁸

Similar to JUST NOT MEANT TO BE telling a story, SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT retells the background event of a failed assassination which is repeated and fulfilled by the band members in the song's music video. Here I also quote the background event as given by the band:

On April 24, 1970, a member of the World United Formosans for Independence Peter Huang (黃文雄) attempted to assassinate Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國), who was the Vice Premier of the Republic of China at the time in front of the Plaza Hotel in New York. The attempt ended in failure, however, when pushed to the ground by security personnel, Huang shouted "let me stand up like a Taiwanese!"³⁹

Shot in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT comparing the KMT party (left) with the Nazis (right)⁴⁰

Although what caught the public's attention was the comparison of the KMT party with the Nazis in the music video (as per the image above), I am more interested in how the song weaves together the erhu, the yueqin, and metal elements and voices, in a manner very different from JUST NOT MEANT TO BE. This difference is evident in the song's structure, simplified below, which

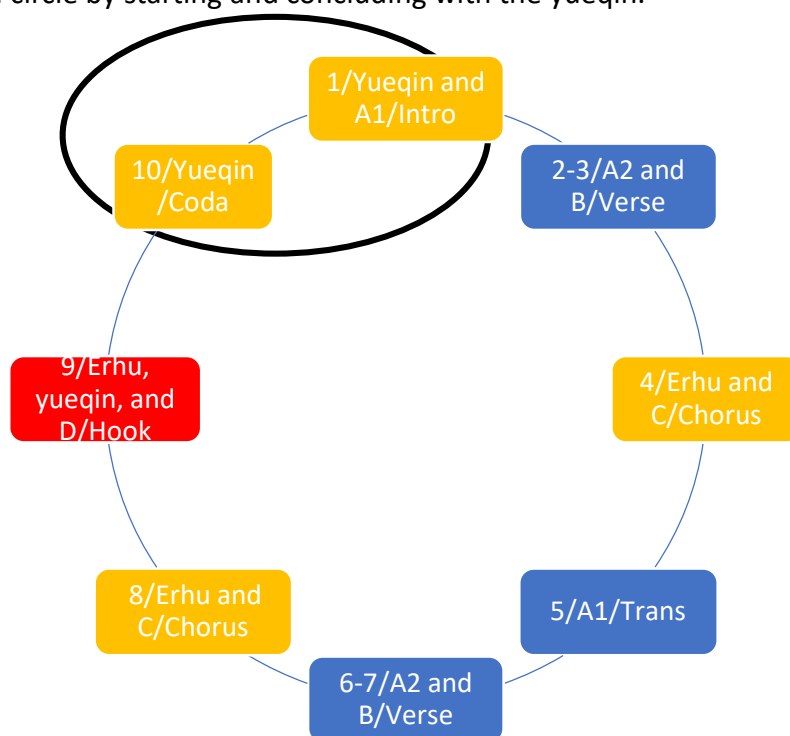
³⁷ *Music Chinese*, 17 Nov. 2009, music.chinesecio.com/article/2009-11/17/content_84860.htm.

³⁸ *CMC music*, n.d., www.cmcmusic.com.tw/%E5%8F%B0%E7%81%A3%E6%9C%88%E7%90%B4.

³⁹ "Inspiration of the Song." 10 June 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jYsu5-TJQ8. The official English lyrics, included in the Appendix, focus on the rhythmic dimension of the Taiwanese language. In terms of phrasing and tone, the English lyrics are also much more moderate than the Taiwanese. My translation of the lyrics attempts to preserve the cultural connotations of the classical Taiwanese used.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

completes a circle by starting and concluding with the yueqin.



The repetition of the transition-verse-chorus pattern in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT is simple, but also atypical in its use of a hook in which both the erhu and the yueqin take part. Whilst JUST NOT MEANT TO BE subordinates metal to folk sounds, SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT's folk and metal elements are of more or less equally importance. The interest of the song lies in how the erhu, the yueqin, and the metal vocals echo each other and deliver a message that does not seem to guarantee comprehension. In the following analysis, I first examine the sound blocks by focusing on the intersections between folk and metal elements. I bring attention to one more unexpected phonic unconsciousness in this catchy song, and examine the song's spectacular music video.

Four descending notes repeated by the yueqin at 00:03-00:06

1/Yueqin and A1/Intro
00:03-00:06, 00:07-00:33

5/A1/Trans
01:49-02:18

The four descending notes previous by the yueqin are now played by the guitar at 01:49-01:52.

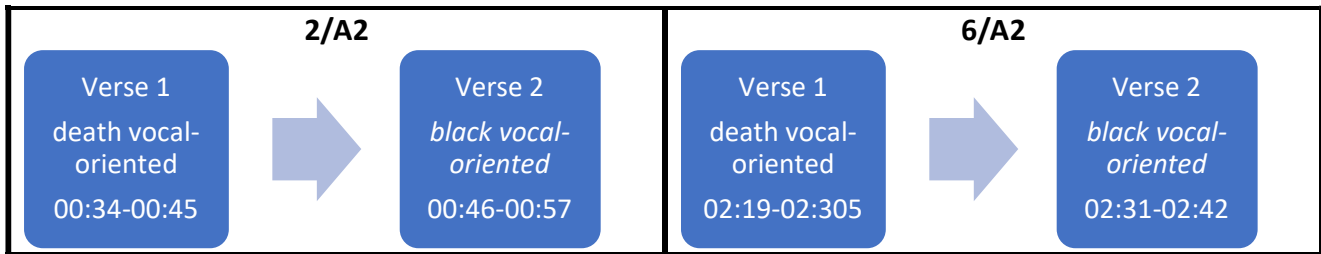
black vocal

*Prolonged scream in 1 / Blood feud in 5
Moon shadowed by the dark clouds, endless darkness*

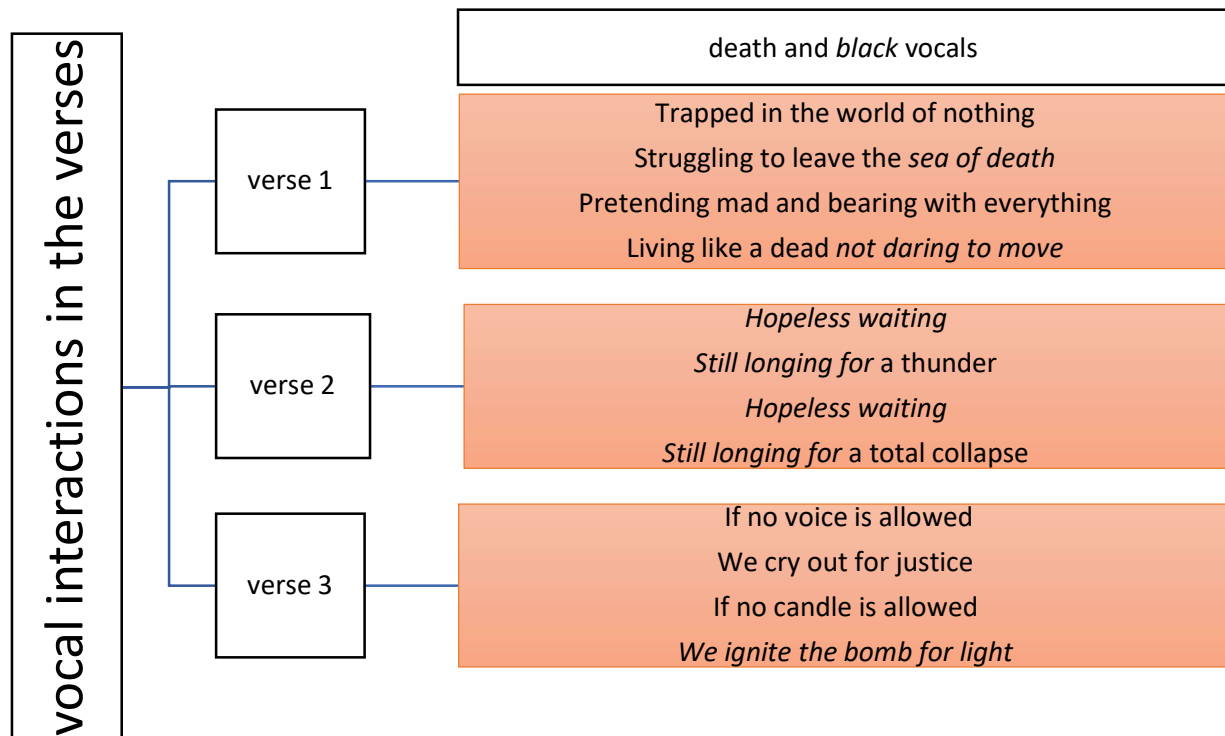
Opened by fast, highly distorted, and repetitive descending notes played on the yueqin at 00:03-00:09, block 1 immediately introduces a tension. Similar to the phonic distortion of the

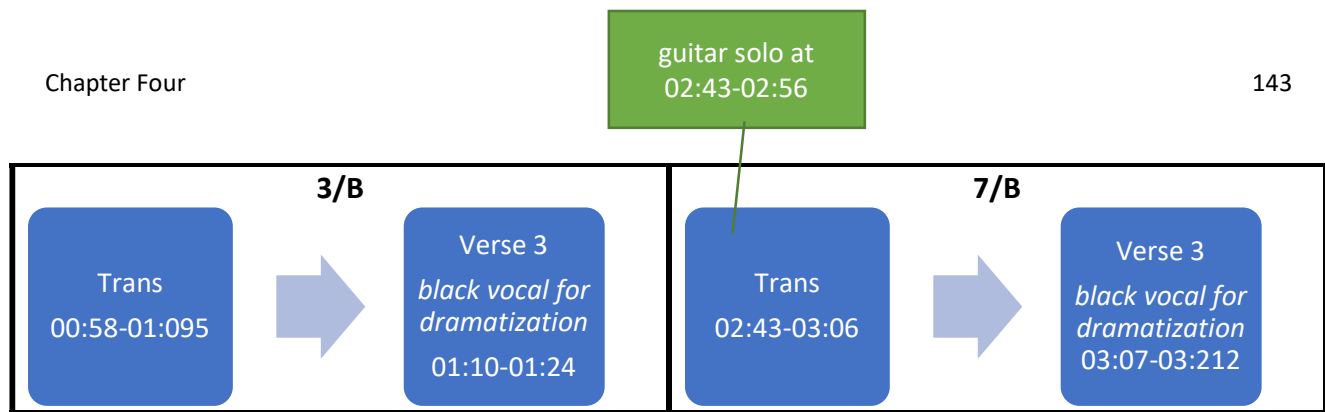
yueqin, A1 is characterized by an extremely distorted black vocal. Starting at 00:22, one scream lasts for 6 seconds, and is followed by another one about “endless darkness.” 1/introduction, in sum, sets up a semi-frantic atmosphere which this song is supposed to resolve. This organization is repeated in 5/transition where a distorted guitar replaces the yueqin and repeats the four descending notes, followed by a prolonged black vocal screaming about a “blood feud.”

Though the verses do not make use of the erhu and the pipa, these relatively short blocks are of narrative importance. I examine some important features in A2 and B and discuss these elements along with the vocals and the lyrics.

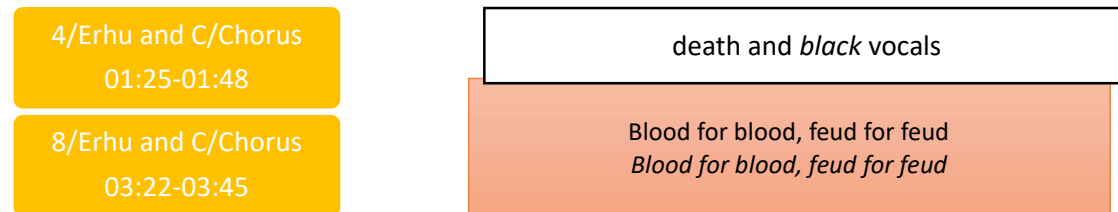


Though there are slight differences in terms of riffs and drumbeats, overall A2 does not differ significantly from A1, and functions as a continuation and elaboration of A1’s semi-frantic atmosphere. The most ear-catching element of A2 is an intensification of the vocal distortion, moving from the death vocal-oriented verse 1 about being trapped in death and not daring to move, to the black vocal-oriented verse 2 screaming about desperation.





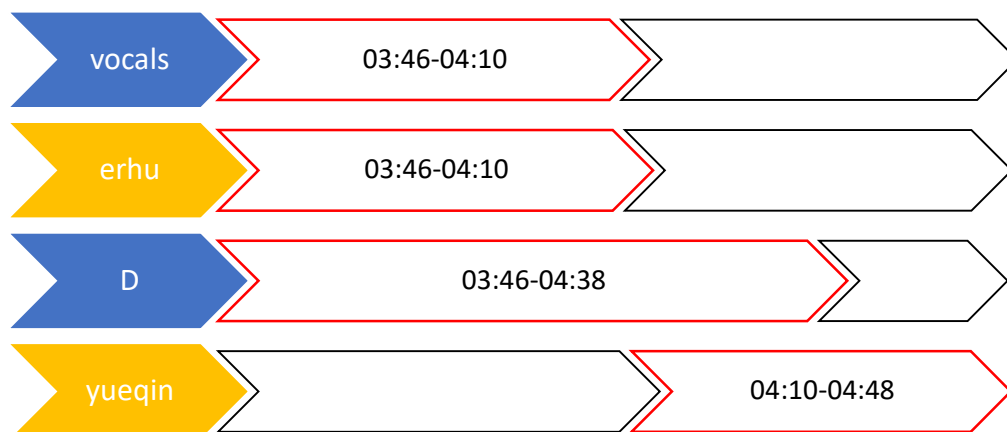
With a prominent role for the cymbals, B intensifies the song's semi-frantic atmosphere, which is continued in verse 3. Here, the death vocal grows about how justice can only be claimed amid political oppression and devocalization; the black vocal, moreover, takes a dramatic turn by expressing a destructive urge to ignite the bomb for light when even the flickers of a candle are not allowed. Considered along with the destructive tone in blocks 3 and 7, the guitar solo in 7 can also be read as destructive, denoting a mental distortion.



Of all sound blocks, C is the most rhythmic and emphatic-sounding one, something most evident when both vocals deliver and repeat “blood for blood, feud for feud.” The erhu, the only source of melody during this part, repeats a melodic line, and also sounds emphatic. As a chorus usually contains the main idea of a song, the combination of the emphatic erhu and the vocals suggests that this song is about blood feud in Taiwan.

Immediately following C, 9/D is the heaviest sound block with the textual hook “Let me stand up like a Taiwanese / Only justice will bring you peace,” in English. This part seems to suggest that only with justice can the blood feud can be solved. At 03:46-04:10 when the erhu is played, the metal vocals take turns, repeating and emphasizing the necessity of justice and peace for Taiwan. Starting at 4:10, during the final repetition of “peace” in a prolonged scream, the yueqin reappears. No longer distorted, the yueqin now plays a longer line, instead of repeating four notes of the introduction. After D disappears at 04:38, the yueqin is the only voice left in the song. Now sounding tranquil, the yueqin functions to conclude the song and resolve its semi-frantic atmosphere.

Below I visualize how the erhu, the yueqin, and the metal vocals—the central elements of SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT—take turns during the hook and the coda.



The background context of SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT is the dictatorship period when “no voice [was] allowed,” as the song makes explicit. Both the cries of the death vocal and the screams of the black vocal share a phonic quality that renders them linguistically almost incomprehensible. I read the extreme vocals as connoting the extremity of political oppression and devocalization in that period. This also explains why the hook is in English, even in the Taiwanese version. Obviously this helps to appeal to the non-Taiwanese speaking listener, but more important here is the historical resonance. As a foreign tongue not always understood, English often eluded censorship in the time of the dictatorship. By combining a non-distorted erhu and the distorted vocals, SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT intends to give voice to the Taiwanese who, not so long ago, were trapped in oppression. Yet their despair and anger is still of concern in the contemporary Taiwanese context. I read the erhu and the metal vocals that deliver the English lyrics as parallel elements; that is, the erhu is also the voice of the Taiwanese people.

So, what about the use of the yueqin in terms of a period when no voice was allowed? Surely, without the distorted, repetitive descending yueqin notes creating the song’s semi-frantic atmosphere, and without the final resolution of the tranquil yueqin line, this song would have sounded different, and the message about the blood feud and pursuit of justice in Taiwan, would have worked differently, affectively speaking. That is to say, the yueqin carries a wordless affective undertone. To consider how the yueqin contributes to this song by voicing something, I briefly recap the parts of the song where the erhu and the yueqin appear.

- 1/introduction: four distorted notes by the yueqin, repeated four times
- 4/chorus: a melodic line by the erhu, repeated four times, corresponding to “blood feud” by the metal vocals, also repeated four times⁴¹
- 5/transition: notes of the yueqin replaced by a distorted guitar, repeated four times
- 8/chorus: a melodic line by the erhu, repeated four times, corresponding to “blood feud” by the metal vocals, also repeated four times
- 9/hook: a melodic line by the erhu, repeated four times, corresponding to “let me

⁴¹ A brief explanation for the non-Taiwanese speakers is needed here. A literal translation of the Taiwanese lyrics 清算血債 清算仇冤 would be “account for (清算) blood (血債) / account for (清算) feud (仇冤),” the two lines varying from the Taiwanese term 血債仇冤, “blood feud.” I translate this part as “blood for blood / feud for feud,” similar to the English phrase “an eye for an eye,” to bring attention to the underlying logic of retaliation. In 4 and 8/choruses, “blood for blood / feud for feud,” delivered twice, is equal to “blood feud” repeated four times.

stand up like a Taiwanese / only justice will bring you peace” by the metal vocals, also repeated four times

- 9/hook and 10/coda: starting from the final “peace,” a melodic line by the no-longer-distorted yueqin, twice in 9 (04:10-04:33), the third and final repetition spanning to 10 (04:34-04:48)

屎).” The final “peace” that helps the no longer distorted yueqin to move away from the repetitions of four-death, is, in my reading, a “pacification,” a blood sacrifice whose logic of justice is retaliation, “blood for blood.” This logic is implied in the song’s Taiwanese and English titles, 破夜斬 (破 as to break, 夜 as night or darkness, 斬 as a cut or beheading) and SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT. I read the classical Taiwanese in the former as “an act of beheading that breaks endless darkness,” and the later, as “supreme pain repaid to the tyrant who caused pain.”

Those who consider this interpretation far-fetched, might be persuaded by what happens in the spectacular music video. In this, the band members slaughter people associated with the KMT. Following my earlier teasing out of the perverse acoustic undertones, I want to focus now on some visual ones. Similar to their denoting different manners of vocalization in the song, whether worded or wordless, in the music video the erhu and the yueqin denote different modes of existence. As important as the yueqin is on an affective level, in the music video it is nowhere to be found. Simultaneously wordless and visually absent, I read the role of the yueqin allegorically, as an acousmatic voice standing for the Taiwanese dead and gone. In comparison, the position of the erhu is more ambivalent. In the music video at 00:40-00:43, Freddy Lim is portrayed as playing the erhu, but is interrupted when the KMT officers appear.



Shots at 00:43 and 00:44 from perspectives of an KMT officer and Freddy Lim, suggesting that his erhu-playing is interrupted by the KMT⁴³

In this part of the music video, the erhu is visually present but sonically absent. This connects the erhu to those Taiwanese people who were voiceless though visible: not yet dead, but “living like the dead.” The visual and phonic incongruity at 00:40-00:43 can be further compared with shots when the erhu is really heard, in 4 and 8/choruses and 9/hook, which show a group of dancers, an arrangement highly unusual in metal music videos. First appearing as marching robotically and saluting the KMT in 3/verse 3, the dancers start dancing wildly in accordance with repetitions of the erhu part and “blood feud” in 4/chorus. Similar but increasingly dramatic arrangements are then reprised in 8/chorus and 9/hook, interspersed with shots of members of Chthonic slaughtering people associated with the KMT and shots of dancers increasingly losing control. I read this as a symbolic representation of the Taiwanese who struggle with traumatic memories and histories, to the extent that they are caught up in a collective madness and even possession. The latter, religious connotation becomes most clear when the yueqin—no longer

⁴³ 10 June 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jYsu5-TJQ8.

distorted, but still without a visual signifier—becomes audible. The literally twisting dancers along with the yueqin have become 群魔亂舞, evil spirits of all sorts dancing in revelry. This is a visual trope that also appears in FUNERAL, although here the trope should be understood as both the dead and alive dancing and reveling in blood sacrifice and vengeance.⁴⁴

The just but also ferocious ending of the music video of SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT is foreshadowed in a fleeting visual substitution at 01:22-01:27. Intriguingly, the distorted, climbing yueqin notes linking 3/verse 3 and 4/chorus are visually misrepresented here as a keyboard at 01:25. This empty visual reference for an already acousmatic voice is as much a possession as the one enacted through the bodies of the Taiwanese dancing. The alternation between madness and possession is later reprised and dramatized, starting from the guitar solo extinguishing candles at 02:43-02:45, and followed by a blood sacrifice where people associated with the KMT are slaughtered. In 10/coda, with only the yueqin left, the camera turns to the band members who finally appear pacified, and ends with an overhead shot of the dancers crawling onto the corpses and eventually dying themselves. The ritual has come to a temporary conclusion, though, alas, by the end all that remains are dead Taiwanese people. This is the perverse, yet not untrue, undertone of SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT: that the Taiwanese dead and alive, past and present, with or without words and voices, are all haunting ghosts in one way or another.

In the case at hand, this is an intentionally performed perversion. The band members playing devils is not unlike how the members of Fresh Juicer dressed as pig gods and funeral handlers. The band name is similarly suggestive. While the English band name Chthonic literally means the non-profanable underworld gods, the Taiwanese band name 閃靈 (*siam-ling* in Taiwanese) refers to the classic thriller *The Shining* (1980), commonly known as 閃靈 (*siam-ling* in Taiwanese, *shan-ling* in Mandarin). It is no coincidence that *The Shining* is a film about being possessed. Chthonic embodies and enacts the possession of former human beings of all sorts, who are all demanding justice. This is also collectively acted out in live gigs when audiences throw hell money (冥紙) around. Burnt as an offering, hell money functions to satisfy the dead. The improper use of hell money leads to a curse that indiscriminately afflicts people. By throwing hell money around without properly burning it, the Taiwanese fans also play as devils and act as though they are possessed.

⁴⁴ The style of dance in 8/chorus and 9/hook is known as 鬼舞, ghost dance.



Chthonic live in *Defending the Country and Pacifying the Dead*, 26 December 2015⁴⁵

Whether defined by some as perverse, shocking, or abnormal,⁴⁶ in the Taiwanese context I read the blood sacrifice in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT and the hell money spectacle in live gigs of Chthonic as *exorcizing rituals*. Freddy Lim has the nickname Ghost king (鬼王); as if he is an incarnation of Guan Yu, the Jade Emperor, who can be invoked to chase away devils.

iii.

Chthonic's Discourse on Taiwanese Folk

JUST NOT MEANT TO BE and SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT highlight how soundscapes and the notion of a sonorous cosmos impact on the Taiwanese, and exemplify how a phonic unconsciousness can be reorganized and mobilized for politically-inflected reflections on, imaginings of, and constructions of what it means to be Taiwanese. By choosing to distort folk sounds or not, both Crescent Lament and Chthonic attempt to deal with the troubled memories and histories of Taiwan, thus performing a profound hauntology of the so-called ghost island (鬼島), (*kui-to* in Taiwanese, *guei-dao* in Mandarin). At stake in JUST NOT MEANT TO BE is how to reconcile oneself with the consequences of silence and amnesia in the past, how to come to terms with Taiwan as

⁴⁵ "Chthonic Controversy: Hell Moneys Everywhere." *Liberty Times Net*, 27 Dec. 2015, news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/1552773.. In this link, it was stated that the picture with hell money was taken from Freddy Lim's *Facebook*, not by the photographer 胡舜翔 of *Liberty Times Net*. This picture has been removed from Freddy Lim's *Facebook* page.

⁴⁶ See my Introduction for more information about responses to, or discursive attacks on Freddy Lim during the parliament election between late 2015 and early 2016, as someone being mentally abnormal.

an incomplete, split, and hybrid entity, so that this search for an identity can continue. At stake in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT is the necessity to address the silence and amnesia that sustained an atrocity of a not-so-distant past, so that it will not happen again. Both reflections, however, are not without problematical implications. While the mindset advocated in JUST NOT MEANT TO BE can easily slide back into silence and amnesia while addressing these very issues, the mindset advocated in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT can spark further divisions between and hostilities among Taiwanese people.

This is evident in the heated debates around Chthonic's discourse on Taiwanese folk. So let me first deal with this, by focusing on the re-articulations involved in Chthonic's valorization of the erhu. I then excavate what I call a "structural rupture" by drawing inspirations from scholarly works on nationalistic construction in metal. Finally, I will reflect on the intentional perversion in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT.

Among the several folk instruments used by Chthonic, the yueqin and the erhu are used in the most consistent ways. Phonically distorted and associated with guitar distortion, the yueqin appeals to the Taiwanese attracted to metal and is generally quite capable of incorporating metal in the Taiwanese context, as observed by Li Shuo (李碩) (151). The association with the distorted guitar, however, may also explain why the yueqin is quite often visually "misrepresented," for example, as a keyboard in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT, and as a zhang (箏) in TAKAO (discussed in the next section). The yueqin stands for metal as a marginal musical genre in Taiwan. This marginality is highlighted in Wu Jian-lian's (吳建樑) cross-examination of the news coverage of Chthonic winning the Golden Melody Award in 2003. The majority of news agencies described Chthonic's music as noise, and commented negatively on the band's winning the award. Even among the few agencies that called it music, there was a sense of confusion about how the band could have won the award (10-13). This reception and overall bewilderment, as Wu points out, related to the cultural-socio hegemony of a Han Taiwanese-Chinese sentiment represented by the award at that time (5-6, 12-13). In this context, Chthonic winning the award indicated that the band enjoyed certain socio-cultural privileges, but remained marginal and deviant due to its political stance. As for this political stance, during the acceptance speech, Freddy Lim (in)famously called Taiwan the mother nation.⁴⁷

Different from the yueqin, the sound of the erhu is seldom distorted, and always has clear visual signifiers. According to Freddy Lim during an interview with Chu Meng-tze (朱夢慈), the band chose to incorporate the erhu because of its plaintive timbre. On the one hand, it distinguishes Chthonic's music from other metal music; on the other, it transmits an emotion that Taiwanese people easily relate to (Chu 18-19). The erhu not only appeals to Taiwanese people in general, but, as Hsu Chien-Jung (許建榮) and Wang Wei-shuo (王維碩) observe, it is an integral part of the band's retelling of stories of the repressed Taiwanese. This retelling also glorifies a subaltern identity because the erhu has become a symbol associated with a particular ethnographic population of Taiwan. That is to say, the erhu as used by Chthonic valorizes a certain identity of Taiwan that Hsu and Wang criticize as problematic for any Han Taiwanese nationalism (Hsu 95-97; Wang 63-64, 67-69). In turn, this Taiwanese folk identity construed through a series of linguistic, musical, and historical re-articulations plays a pivotal role in the band's advocacy for Taiwanese independence.

⁴⁷ For the consequent controversy and omission of this speech in broadcast, see Hsu 93.

To be sure, this appropriation and re-articulation of folk elements for political ideologies is not an isolated phenomenon, and one that is increasingly common in metal. In his article “*Remain True to the Earth!*: Remarks on the Politics of Black Metal,” Benjamin Noys argues that metal borders on a void due to its onto-political ambivalence. Metal can only retain a consistency through constant discursive dis- and re-articulations that appeal to imaginary, narrowly or even singularly defined collectives which share a “ground,” the “land,” thus forming a “folk” (115). For Noys, this explains why certain genres of metal easily give way to the extreme right, to Nazism, fascism, or ultra-nationalism (105). Although Noys emphasizes right-wing political extremity, this kind of discursive construction also takes place in the left wing. In his article “From Forest Unknown: Eurometal and the Political/Audio Unconsciousness,” Scott Wilson cautions against the surging left-wing nationalism and racism in European metal, and describes this as a form of nationalistic fetishism. What can propel such fetishization are images and sounds that affectively work with a political unconscious. Yet the danger of this mechanism is that specific images and sounds do not always meet or “sync with” what they are idealized for, and can crumble at any moment (150-52).

Chthonic’s construction of a Taiwanese folk identity where the erhu plays an important role can be understood as a left-leaning Han-Taiwanese nationalistic form of fetishization. Yet the erhu as Chthonic has “generally” used it, does not totally discredit the band’s political engagement and intervention. The case of SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT, however, is a structural rupture from their previous use of the instrument. In this song, the erhu both re-articulates and dis-articulates the identity it glorifies. To explain how this rupture happens, I focus on the song’s logic of justice in retaliation, the “blood for blood” theme, during which the erhu is audibly dominant. I read this logic along with Lacan’s reflection on subject formation through the object voice.

In the previous chapter, I argued that Lacan refrains from fully theorizing the object voice because he intuitively senses a void of negativity happening in it. At stake in this void, I also pointed out, is a loop between hallucinatory subjectification (or fetishization) and de-subjectification, which Lacan considers as two forms of symbolic death. In SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT whose logic is “blood for blood” incited by a negativity of “endless darkness,” the loop manifests itself as negativity substituting negativity. This is most obvious in the song’s use of the incomprehensible metal vocals paralleled by the erhu as a “cry for justice” and “peace,” in response to devocalization. Taken as whole, SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT is a void of negativity where darkness, irrationality, and death all converge, which is evidenced in the lines of verse 1:

Trapped in the world of nothing
 Struggling to leave the sea of death
 Pretending mad and bearing with everything
 Living like a dead not daring to move

Put extremely, according to this particular background, the logic of the song can be translated into “death for death.” In the Taiwanese context where the unprofanable is common, distinguishing symbolic deaths from physical ones makes little sense.

Thus, the *si*-death that Taiwanese people hear from nowhere and everywhere, is issued together by the yueqin, the erhu, and the distorted guitar. Though different in terms of targets

of critique, SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT and FUNERAL are very much alike in terms of their hauntology and spectrality, 鬼哭神號, with devils/demons shrieking and gods/spirits howling, trapped in shitty (si) life-death circles, roaming the ground of the ghost island.

3.

Metal and Political Discontents

舌燦蓮花 *Speaking tongue with lotus*

筆下生花 *Writing as if blossoming*

I opened this chapter with the claim that metal in Taiwan is politically activist in nature, and launched my exploration of soundscapes of Taiwan to argue for this claim. As is clear by now, by weaving together folk music, manifold traumatized histories and memories, and the sonorous cosmos of all beings, Taiwanese metal actively takes part in a politics that responds to Taiwan's internationally voiceless and domestically noisy situation. It has also become clear that, although Taiwanese metal songs share a sentiment to account for past injustices, the individual strategies of activism may vary, and there are moments when these strategies are so drastic that it is questionable if some people hear anything other than noise.

Admittedly, in the previous section I was carried away by my urge to speak in and function as a voice for Taiwan. Struggling to write down and explain how voices, sounds and soundscapes modulate, shape, and accompany me, in a foreign language I do not always feel at home in, I do not stand aside from forms of forgetting and remembering, from forms of silence and amnesia. I pushed aside many other beings that constitute Taiwan, in being led by my own passionate political aspiration. Pushed aside and repressed by me, they nevertheless return again and again, *blossoming* in my *tongue-tied writing*.

Scholarly speaking, my language is metaphorical, here—perhaps too metaphorical. Yet flowers and blossoms are powerful tropes in the Taiwanese context that function both as metonymies and metaphors. As metonymies they are contiguous with the Taiwanese society; as metaphors they may represent several things, among which the cycle of blossoming and decay that concerns the Taiwanese history and people. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that flowers or blossom often play a role in Taiwanese metal. This is, however, remarkable in the wider context of metal music. Most metal elsewhere does not tend to include these kinds of tropes. In THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN, for instance, there are close-up shots of flowers at 01:48-01:56; in FUNERAL there is the funeral lotus at 02:40-03:02, burnt as offerings. In JUST NOT MEANT TO BE there is the opening line 曉風殘月黃花堆—“dawning breeze, crescent moon, withering flowers,” imagery and personification conveying an aura of desolation—in an album named 花殤, *Elegy for the Blossoms*. And even if no particular flowers appear, their form is present, for instance at the end of SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT. At least for me, the piles of bodies look like either a bloody flower, like a funeral lotus, or like hell money that is meant to be burnt. In all cases flower images dwell in soundscapes as part of a collective (un)consciousness that always already manifests itself in several modalities.

Observing the recurrence of the motifs “rain,” “night,” and “flower” in Taiwanese music,

Zheng Shu-zhen (鄭淑珍) argues that these are important parts of an imagery conveying collective memories of Taiwan. The flower, according to Zheng, connotes specific forms of torment for the Taiwanese, especially those of females during the Japanese colonial period and the KMT dictatorship (6: 1-8).⁴⁸ Alongside the sounds of the erhu and the yueqin, we have another form of voicing here. The flower, such will be my argument, is not just an image: it speaks, though it is not always heard. For me, at least, the omni-presence of the flower gestures to a simultaneous forgetting and remembering that, in the first instance, I failed to restructure. This is why, in this section, I would like to expand soundscapes to the visual dimension and consider how this flower is made use of in two metal songs. I first examine the flower as enacting a historical complex in Chthonic's TAKAO 皇軍 (高砂軍 *Takasago Army*, 2011), and then move on to the paired blossoming of a flower and justice in FLOWER FOR JUSTICE? 正義的花? (若是一蕊號做正義的花 *If There is a Flower Called Justice*, 2013) by the Taiwanese metalcore band Burning Island (火燒島). Finally, I will reflect on the basis of the flower's "voice," on what it means and takes to be Taiwanese—a shared concern of the songs in this chapter—and I explain the socio-cultural and political hegemony involved in Taiwanese metal.

i.

Cherry Blossoms and Identity Complex in TAKAO

Among the many songs of Chthonic, TAKAO⁴⁹ is no doubt one of the most popular, so popular that one can sing its acoustic version in KTV (a Karaoke Box).

72970	台語	事到如今	喬幼	☐
72971	台語	思念的夢	喬幼	☐
72972	台語	皇軍(民謠版)	閃靈樂團	☐
72973	台語	博仔聲	林孟宗	☐
72974	台語	無名英雄	曾瑋中	☐

A KTV song list including the folk version of TAKAO⁵⁰

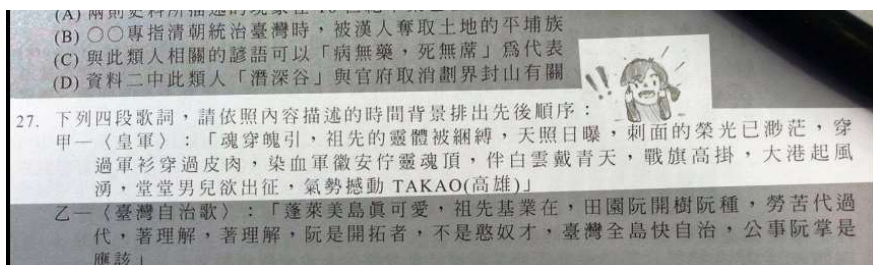
TAKAO is not only popular in Taiwan. The song's historical narrative has become canonical and is included in Taiwanese textbooks, even appearing in a mock college entrance exam.

⁴⁸ "Rain," "Night," and "Flower" in *Taiwanese Songs*. 2010. National Kaohsiung Normal University. MA thesis. See especially Zheng's discussion about the classic Taiwanese song TORMENT OF A FLOWER/RAINY NIGHT FLOWER 雨夜花 (1934), which *Elegy for the Blossoms* refers to in the opening track. It should also be noted that an imagery of rain and night appears in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT as thunder (霆雷響) and endless darkness/night (茫茫的暗暝)

For TORMENT OF A FLOWER/RAINY NIGHT FLOWER (雨夜花), see 27 May 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0v9jLI2jE; for Crescent Lament's musical reference, see 9 Sept. 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9I2cMxMF58.

⁴⁹ TAKAO. 17 June 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3t-0Mly-fc. Again, the official English lyrics focus on the rhythmic dimension of Taiwanese and are thematically more moderate. My translation attempts to preserve the cultural connotations of the classical Taiwanese used. The official version can be found in the Appendix.

⁵⁰ 2 Feb. 2015, blog.xuite.net/pensively2002/music/303284292-%E3%80%8E%E9%8C%A2%E6%AB%83KTV%E3%80%8F104%E5%B9%B4%E6%9C%88%E4%BB%BD%E6%96%B0K%E6%AD%8C%E5%96%AE.



Lyrics of TAKAO in mock exam, with the student's kuso illustration⁵¹

Popular and canonical as it may be, TAKAO is also one of Chthonic's most controversial songs. Some, for instance, consider the song as appropriating the history of the indigenous Taiwanese, whereas others accuse Chthonic of glorifying Japanese militarism. To explain why the Taiwanese response to TAKAO was so polarized, I first briefly explain the background story of the song. I then consider the song's overall arrangement and its message. Finally, I will focus on the chorus and its visual correspondence of cherry blossoms, and show why this phonic, visual, and narrative arrangement is a profound historical complex that the Taiwanese people have yet to tackle.

TAKAO recounts a history about the Takasago Volunteers (高砂義勇隊), who were indigenous Taiwanese tribes fighting for Japan during WWII when Taiwan was a Japanese colony. Seeing off her lover at the port of Takao (nowadays called 高雄, Kaohsiung), the narrator of TAKAO laments about how the sun, thereby indicating Japan, is so blinding that the indigenous Taiwanese are losing their identities. This identity crisis is indicated in the music video where the narrator has a tattooed face according to indigenous custom, but is dressed in a Japanese kimono. She constantly stares at the camera from in front of a black screen, in a manner of silent accusation.



⁵¹ 4 Nov. 2016, www.facebook.com/chthonictw/posts/10154048373437503:0. Kuso means crap in Japanese; in Taiwan kuso is a common practice of parody, twisting cultural hegemony into bad humor. The visual incongruity in the music video of JUST NOT MEANT TO BE also has this kuso dimension.

Shot of the female narrator with the tattooed face and in a Japanese kimono in TAKAO⁵²

TAKAO also incorporates the yueqin and the erhu. While the yueqin is distorted and visually portrayed as a zhang (箏), the erhu is played in a regular way by Freddy Lim.



Image of a zhang⁵³

Incorporated in 1/introduction and 3/transition, the yueqin functions primarily to build up intensity, an emotional heaviness. Different from the yueqin, which is only used in the transitional passages, the erhu, again signifying a Taiwanese identity, often accompanies the vocals delivering the lyrics and elaborates on this emotional heaviness. The narrative-thematic emphasis on a Taiwanese collective is evident in block 6.



In this block, at 02:37-02:59, the guitar solo is replaced by an erhu solo. At 03:00-03:22, the erhu continues to play, during which the narrator becomes the lover of the female protagonist, as is made clear in the lines “Farewell in the harbor / You sob when seeing off my ship / Please wait for my glorious return / And continue our unfinished dream.” Addressing and re-assuring his lover, the second narrator acknowledges the emotional heaviness weighing on the Taiwanese people, but expresses his hope for a future he might have control over. This change of narrator is also a shift of viewpoint with respect to the song’s emotional heaviness. That is to say, at 03:00-03:22 the song presents a particular kind of dialogue between the erhu, the female narrator, and her lover as an alternative narrator. This dialogue simultaneously happens on musical, vocal, and thematic levels. This arrangement is a common practice in Taiwanese music, especially in Taiwanese folk opera where the erhu often functions as a voice interacting with the folk opera singers.

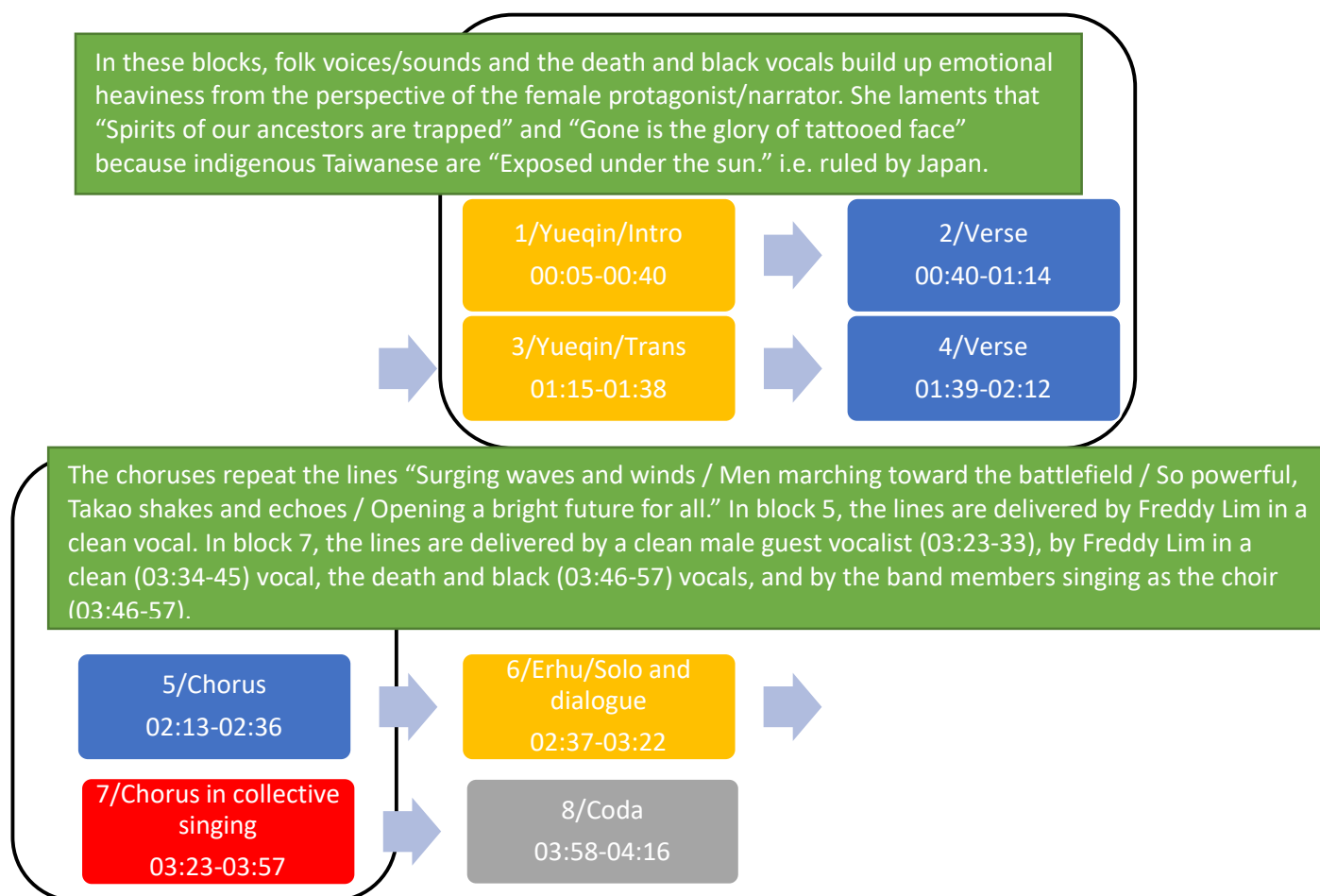
⁵² 17 June 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3t-0Mly-fc. The song’s emphasis on the Taiwanese conflicting identities can also be detected in the visual parallels between paper plane, toy gun, bamboo copter, and the Japanese fighter aircraft.

⁵³ *Tainan University of Technology*, n.d., club.tut.edu.tw/c06/main5.htm.

Damon I-Kai Liu (劉逸凱) and Wang both bring attention to this kind of simultaneous musical, vocal, narrative, and thematic arrangements. Liu phrases it as a combination of conversation and contraposition. Reading the conversation and contraposition along with the band's lyrics in classical Taiwanese, Liu suggests that this arrangement functions as dialogues between the Taiwanese (96-98). Similarly, referring to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of literary narrative, Wang reads this as a polyphonic arrangement through which Taiwanese of diverse backgrounds negotiate. Wang further observes the band's decreasing use of this arrangement since the 2005 album 賽德克巴萊 *Seediq Bale*, and criticizes Chthonic for downplaying dialogue in favor of the aggrandization of oppression (64-67). In the following, I call the combination of conversation and polyphony a dialectical dialogue, to highlight the shifts of viewpoint taking place. In the light of Wang's criticism, but differing from him, I consider the diminishment of dialogue as mirroring the history of the Seediq tribes who nearly became extinct after their rebellion against the Japanese rule.⁵⁴ In this context, the use of a dialectical dialogue in TAKAO in the 2011 album *Takasago Army* appears to carry a particular meaning. To make the significance of this dialectical dialogue clear, I examine block 7, the song's climax, and explain the relationship between blocks 6 and 7.

The core of TAKAO lies in how the emotional heaviness is built up and elaborated from two perspectives in blocks 1 to 6, and finally released through collective singing together in 7/chorus, before the song concludes. Below I map the general song structure, and notate the vocal arrangements and lyrics that are of particular importance.

⁵⁴ The rebellion, called 霧社事件, is the theme of the critically acclaimed two-part film 賽德克巴萊 *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale* (2011) by Wei Te-sheng (魏德聖). The cherry blossom is a central visual motif in the second part of the film. About the rebellion, see "Musha Incident." en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musha_Incident. About the film, see www.imdb.com/title/tt2007993, and www.imdb.com/title/tt4164468/?ref_=tt_rec_tt.



Block 7 is not only the song’s climax in terms of its vocal complexity, but, more importantly, also in terms of empowerment. This empowerment comes through the choir’s singing together, the lines of which are in Taiwanese even in the song’s English version. Arguably, what makes the Taiwanese people “so powerful [that] Takao shakes and echoes” is not so much the erhu’s plaintive solo at 02:37-02:59, but the dialectical dialogue at 03:00-03:22. I read the erhu playing in this part as the Taiwanese responding to and empowering each other in relation to their earlier powerlessness. In my opinion, this is why the lines in this part remain in Taiwanese in the English version. The message of the song is that despite the loss of identities (through the references to ancestors and tattoo), despite the struggles and difficulties (through references to sea journey and battlefield), Taiwanese people do not give in or give up, and move on to “continue [an] unfulfilled dream” and to “open for a bright future for all,” that is, for Taiwan as one collective community.

TAKAO taken as a whole is consistent with the band’s discursive valorization of the erhu and their glorification of the repressed Taiwanese folk. Though different in terms of tone, TAKAO is quite similar to JUST NOT MEANT TO BE. Both songs draw an analogy between sea journeys, fates, and struggles experienced by the Taiwanese; both invoke scarred memories and histories of

Taiwan carried through, voiced by the erhu; both tell stories from the perspectives of female narrators who also converse with their fellow Taiwanese people.

Although TAKAO does not refer to flowers in the lyrics, in the music video, precisely during 7/chorus, the cherry blossom is the predominant visual signifier, and is associated with the female narrator, now an elderly woman, who finally smiles.



Shots of cherry blossom and the female narrator smiling to the blossom at 03:29-03:32.

The blossom shots, considered alongside the singing, hint at the possibility that the cherry blossom is to be read as the band's attempt to give voice to the minorities among the Taiwanese, as exemplified by the song's female indigenous narrator. This empowerment of minorities by way of the Taiwanese as one collective community, however, is also troubling and contradictory.

First, given the decades-long exploitation and repression that the indigenous Taiwanese populations have suffered, TAKAO has been understood by some as replicating Han socio-cultural hegemony. Indicatively, the acoustic version of TAKAO (失竊千年 *Timeless Sentences*, 2014) dispenses with lines referring to indigenous ancestors and tattoos. Second, as novelist and cultural critic Zhu You-zun (朱宥勳) points out, even when the internal complexity of Taiwan is accepted, the song's empowerment of the Taiwanese people ruled by Japan does not go well with the band's anti-KMT stance and view of the party as yet another colonizer. With respect to this, Zhu provocatively asks how the Taiwanese are supposed to feel about TAKAO, with so many conflicting identities and subjectivities reemerging, in a sense "blooming" at the same time, and concludes that this song manifests a historical complex that Chthonic have not yet managed to tackle.⁵⁵

The historical complex explains why in the music video the very blossoms that bring a smile to the female narrator also cut and scar the members of Chthonic, as is shown by the stills below.

⁵⁵ 你說「解殖」，那你喜歡閃靈的〈皇軍〉嗎？“Decolonization? How About TAKAO?” 16 Feb. 2015, opinion.udn.com/opinion/story/7344/712228.

For the acoustic version of TAKAO, see 24 Nov. 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXSKtLvK-Vw.



Shots of cherry blossom cutting the band members at 03:39-03:57.⁵⁶

Taken together, the blossom, the female protagonist, and the band's performing the music and singing together, imply a simultaneous empowerment and continued trauma of the collective Taiwanese community. Not unlike the female narrator who embodies two conflicting identities, with her tattoo and kimono respectively representing indigenous Taiwan and Japan, Taiwanese people nowadays, even when empowered and able to move on, still experience the traumas that run through generations. In *TAKAO*, the inaudibly speaking or singing flower is remembered in a bittersweet manner; it modulates, empowers, colors, and scars the Taiwanese.

Despite its problematics, *TAKAO*'s sustained ambiguity around identity is a likely reason for its popularity and canonical status in Taiwan. For the many Taiwanese who grew up listening to the reminiscences of the elderly, some identifying as Japanese, some Taiwanese, some Chinese, and quite often mixed to the point of being incoherent, *TAKAO* cannot be listened to without ambivalence and anxiety. This is similar to the Taiwanese reactions to *JUST NOT MEANT TO BE*. One reason of said incoherence is the policy of Japanization (皇民化) during WWII and KMT's anti-Japan propaganda since the take-over of Taiwan after WWII. As a result of this policy, many Taiwanese people growing up in the late phase of the Japanese colonial rule self-identified as Japanese, and were often targeted by the KMT. It should also be noted that whether during the Japanese colonial period or the KMT occupation, the indigenous Taiwanese populations were treated as inferior and constantly subjected to repression, exploitation, and even massacre.⁵⁷ Bearing scars and marching toward battlefields, like the ending shot of *TAKAO* illustrates, the Taiwanese nevertheless move on. Yet, how exactly, and where to?

⁵⁶ 17 June 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3t-OMIy-fc.

⁵⁷ See "Japanization" and "Taiwanese Indigenous Peoples" for general information: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanization; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiwanese_indigenous_peoples.



Ending shot of TAKAO portraying a Taiwanese bearing a Taiwan-shaped scar about to join battles⁵⁸

As the image makes clear, there is yet another repetition at stake. The figure on the forehead of the young man is not just an icon for Taiwan, it is also an opening through which a spirit-like beam projects itself, as if the young man is possessed by some sort of spirit.

ii.

Blossoming of a Flower in FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?

The cherry blossom brings in an imagistic-phonetic unconsciousness, as simply one flower embodying a voice that is contiguous to the ground and soil of Taiwan, a place I call home. What does this flower and what do my fellow Taiwanese people whisper to me? To get a better grasp on this, I want to approach the blossoming of a flower in FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?⁵⁹ by Burning Island, a song that is narrated from the perspective of this flower. In the following, I focus on the phonetic unconsciousness involved by examining the song's overall arrangement. I also draw attention to its resonances with songs I previously discussed. I then consider the imagistic modality by examining the music video.

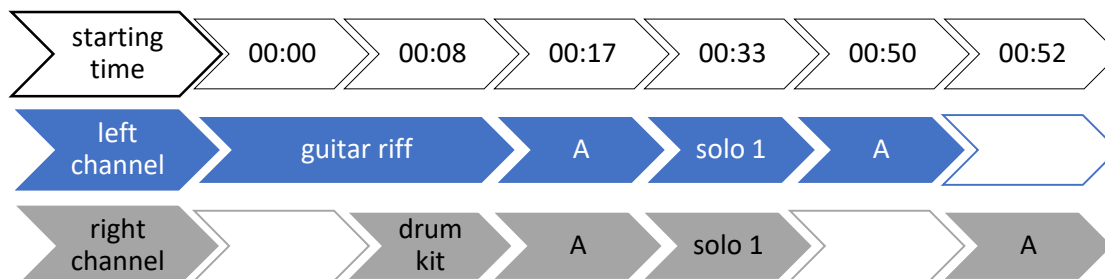
The first aspect of FLOWER FOR JUSTICE? that catches the attention is its opening, which distributes and emphasizes musical elements across different channels, and further includes an atypical solo 1; atypical in that, according to metal conventions, it comes "too early."

1/A/Intro
00:00-00:53

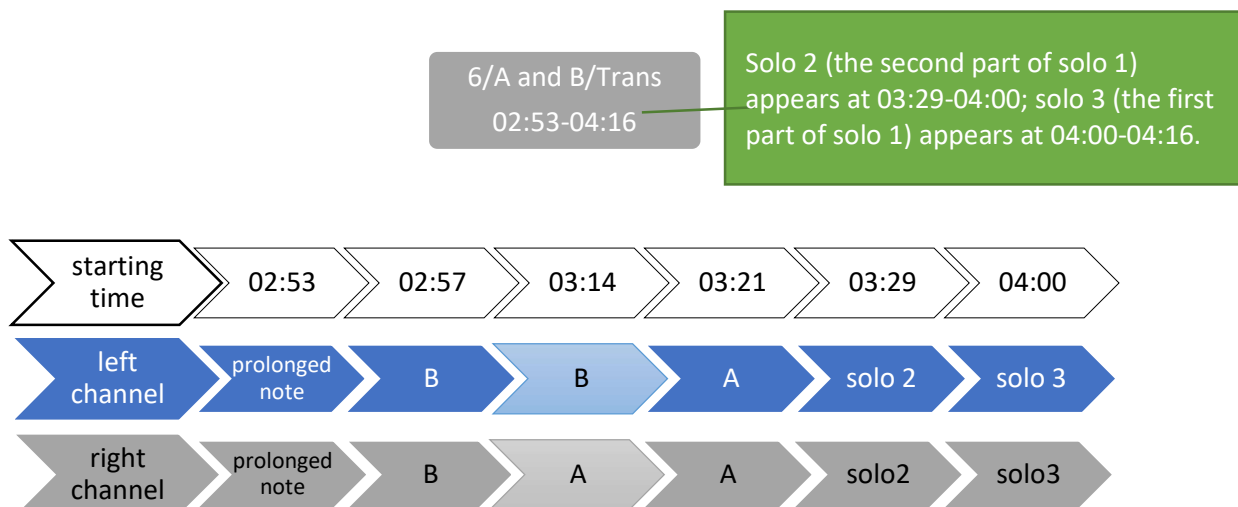
Solo 1 appears at 00:33-00:49.

⁵⁸ 17 June 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3t-0Mly-fc.

⁵⁹ FLOWER FOR JUSTICE? 14 Mar. 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gul5fH_SKA.



Due to the maneuver of sound outputs at 00:00-00:17 and 00:50-00:53, 1/A is highly affective, and can be experienced as a bit disorienting, especially when played loud on a stereo set. A similar but simpler maneuver later appears in the also atypical block 6 with solos 2 and 3.



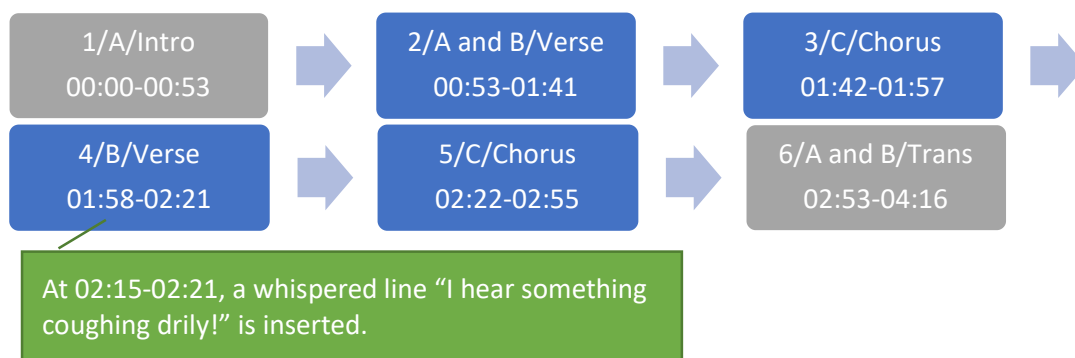
A close listening reveals that solo 2 is a variation and expansion of the second part of solo 1 (starting at 00:44), and that solo 3 is a variation of the first part of solo 1. From the above two flow charts it can be detected further that phonic and musical arrangements in blocks 1 and 6, both transitional passages, parallel each other, although some components at 00:33-00:53 and at 03:29-04:00 are varied. The two blocks, then, simultaneously function on phonic, musical, and structural levels. This is similar to how *JUST NOT MEANT TO BE* builds on folk elements in the transitions, and so the question is whether they also are meaningful on a thematic narrative level.

The song's narrative has three voice types (the death vocal, the echoed death vocal, and the black vocal) speaking from the perspective of the flower that I read as the Taiwanese, longing for "justice and light." A flower might be longing for light, but it is distinctly the Taiwanese who are longing for justice. This is suggested, for instance, in a chorus text such as:

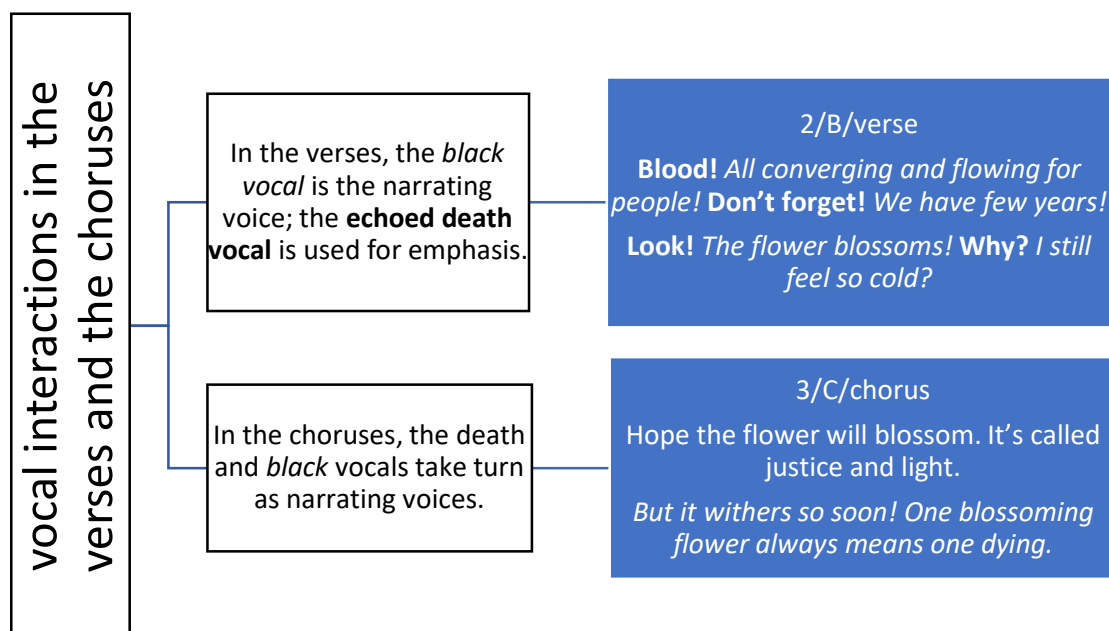
Hope the flower will blossom
It's called justice and light

But it withers so soon!
One blossoming flower always means one dying

The above quote gives me reason to suggest that the flower is a metaphor for Taiwanese identity here, which I will notate as flower/Taiwanese. In this context, in *FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?*, the voices not only take turn in terms of speaking and singing, but also in terms of viewpoints on the flower's existence: between blossom and withering, life and death, hope and doubt, eternity and evanescence. The song is distinctly allegorical in that this is not just a personified speaking and singing flower, but also a collective of people in dialogue and dialectically related, similar to the passage at 03:00-03:23 in *TAKAO* (where the erhu's voice functioned as a Taiwanese answering fellow Taiwanese people). Yet different from *TAKAO*, here the dialogues take place in sound blocks that form units at a structural and narrative level. Before I further discuss the theme of Taiwanese-in-collective-dialogue, I would like to bring attention to the song's two largest units/dialogues, namely the transition-verse-chorus (A, B, and C) that exist next to D/hook.



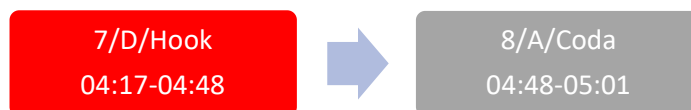
The song's structure that alters the verse-chorus-transition sequence is similar to solos 2 and 3 varying from and expanding on solo 1. A closer listening reveals that A, B, and C all engage with the same group of notes, but sound different. Among the three, A sounds steady; B sounds ruptured because of longer suspensions between riff-pickings; C is more melodic due to the use of prolonged notes. These distinctive feels "modulate" interactions between the three voices engaging in a collective dialogue. In the following chart I summarize the ways voice types interact in this song and I provide some paradigmatic lines as examples.



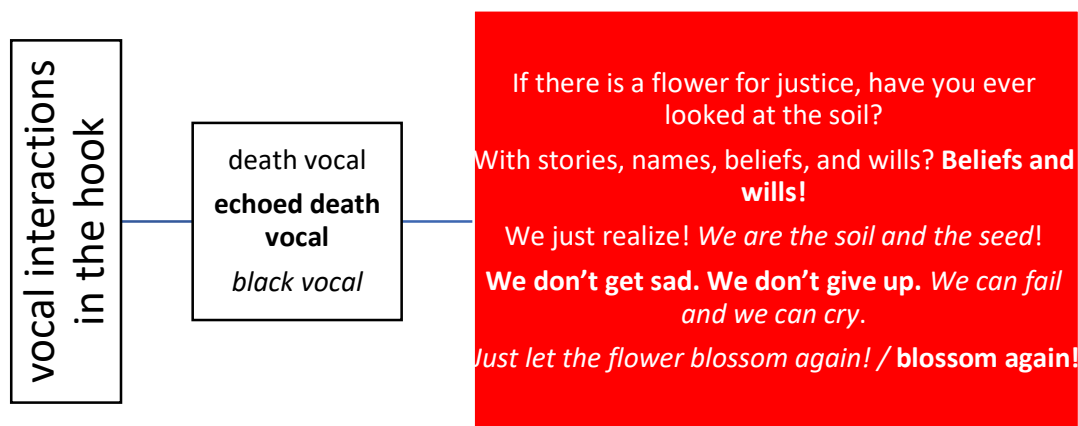
In the verses accompanied by B, with its ruptured sounds, there is a contrast between the two voice types. The tone of the linguistically articulate, narrating black vocal is straightforward. Due to the use of a question (“Why?”), the tone of the collective speaking in the echoed death vocal sounds uncertain. In 2 and 4/B/verse the collective dialectical dialogue is enacted through two voices. In 4/B/verse, this dialogue is followed by a whisper “I hear something coughing drily!” at 02:16-02:18. This whisper is not immediately audible, due to its relatively low volume and accompanying drone-sounding notes. However, if played loudly, especially on a stereo set, it is felt by the body and is highly affective. I consider this whisper a background undertone, the source of which is beings of all sorts in the sonorous cosmos.

In the chorus, both the death and black vocals are linguistically articulate and phonically smoother or less ruptured, in line with the accompanying part C that sounds melodic, and appears to suggest that the Taiwanese are in control of language and voice. Yet, having voice and language does not ease the sense of uncertainty created in B/verse. While the first part of the chorus is optimistic in tone, the second part takes a pessimistic turn. The collective dialogue in C/chorus is thus enacted in the domain of language (*logos* in the narrow sense) that does not appear to blossom as “justice and light” (*logos* in the broad sense). I read the song’s trajectory from blocks 1 to 6, especially at 00:00-03:28, as working through a dynamic of inclusion-exclusion or empowerment-oppression in relation to *logos*: from wordless phonic manipulation, to worded voices/sounds, to a voice supposedly standing for identity, subjectivity, and political agency, to plummeting back to wordless phonic manipulation after hearing beings of all sorts speak (see the above song structure and flow charts, especially 6/A and B).

This resulting collective devocalization raises a question with respect to the nature of solos 2 and 3 (03:29-04:16) reversing solo 1 that I qualified as “too early.” This question about the solos leads me to the rest of the song consisting of 7/D/hook and 8/A/coda.



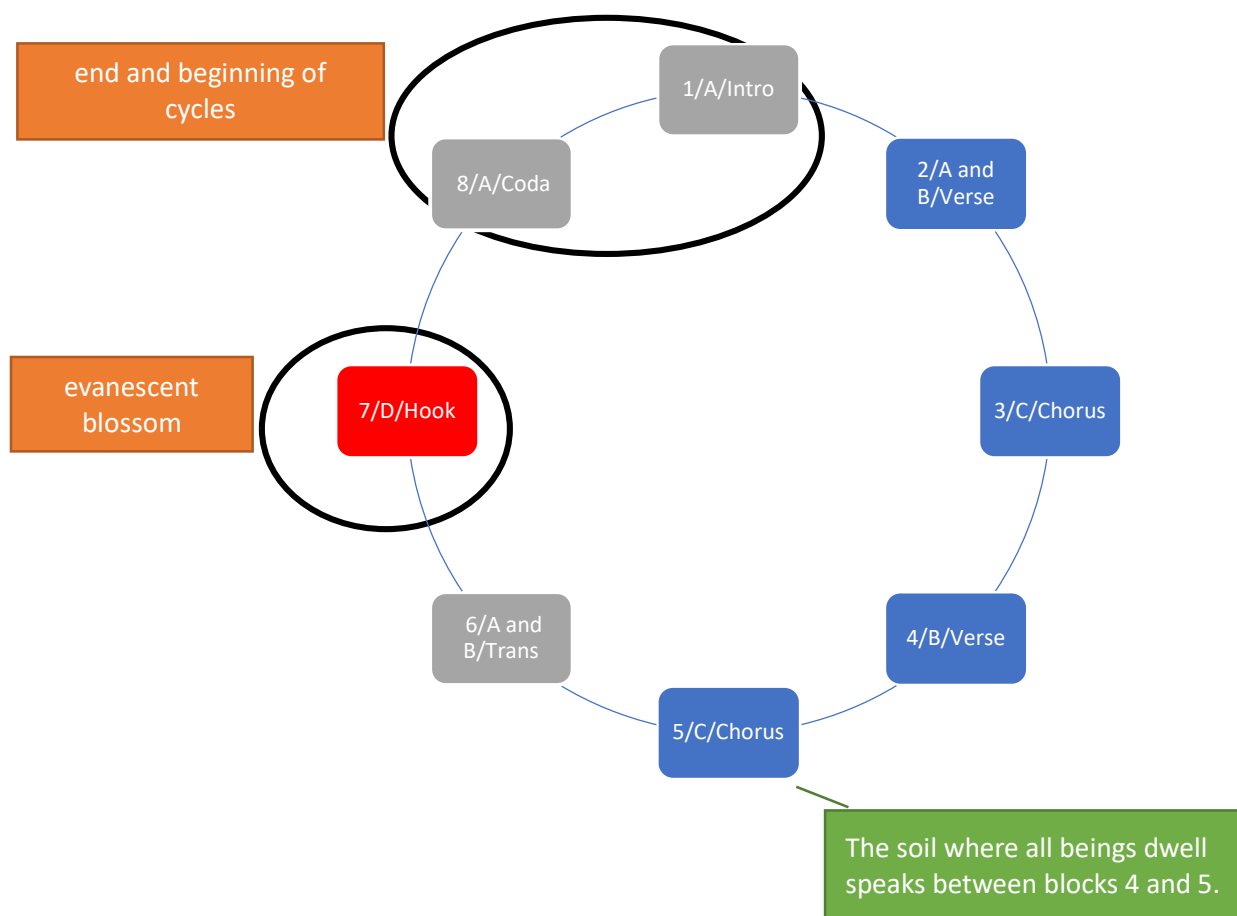
Earlier, I termed 7/D/hook the other structural-narrative unit. D engages with a new group of notes previously not used in A, B, and C, and it is the only part not varied and repeated. It is also the hook to be imprinted in the listener's mind and soul. Vocally, the three voice types all speak in articulate manners, their tone now resolute and hopeful.



If we listen closely to the dialogue accompanied by D, a sound block that feels increasingly urgent due to a brisk riff combined with an increasing use of cymbals, we may notice that the tone of the two main narrating voices (the death vocal and the black vocal) is indeed urgent, realizing that it is the ground, "soil and seed" from which any flower takes root and sprouts. This realization enables the flower/Taiwanese (the echoed death vocal) to assert "beliefs and wills" and to further move on in a linguistically articulate manner: "we don't get sad / we don't give up." As a synecdoche, the Taiwanese as one collective then sing together the final line and call out: "blossom." 7/D/hook as such appears quite hopeful, suggesting that the Taiwanese finally have a voice, language, and justice.

Solely considering the trajectory from blocks 1 to 7, solos 2 and 3 can be read as empowering. Yet the song's ending in 8/A undermines this hopeful reading. Even when we dispense with phonic manipulation, A at 04:49-04:56 (8/coda) is the same as A at 00:09-00:16. Given the enactment of the empowerment-oppression dialectic in blocks 1 to 6 that succumbed back to devocalization, solos 2 and 3 might as well be read as the pole of empowerment whose oppressive pole is foreshadowed in 8/A/coda. This possibility cannot be ruled out. After all, FLOWER FOR JUSTICE? suggests a self-referential song that both thematizes and iconically repeats a flower cycle of blossoming and withering, that is, a dialectical dialogue whose self-presence and fulfillment always already imply self-negation and destruction (as was the case with ENJOY THE SILENCE in Chapter Three).

Visualized the song looks like this, then:



Any listener, reader, or viewer might be gripped by uncertainty as well. The question is whether the collective dialectical dialogue blossoms as communication, or whether it is more a matter of voices and sounds that come together in indistinction, which would be similar to what happened in *FUNERAL* and *SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT*. Anyone might have a bad feeling upon hearing the whispered “I hear something coughing drily,” a sentence expressed shortly after “root” and “soil” are mentioned for the first time.⁶⁰ The ground or land the flower/Taiwanese appeals to might not be as benign as expected. It might rather concern a ghost island or an island on fire, revolting against political oppression, something that is indicated by the band’s name. Burning Island refers to a failed rebellion of political prisoners, known as the Burning Island Incident (火燒島事件) which, for the Taiwanese, has become a symbol of the political persecution and censorship in the last phase of the Martial Law.⁶¹

⁶⁰ The lines in full are: “Listen! I hear something coughing drily! / Listen! Is it from the root? / Listen! I hear something coughing drily! / Listen! Is it from the soil? / I hear something coughing drily!”

⁶¹ This incident consists of two rebellions: the first one took place on November 29, 1987, in Taitung; the second one on December 1, 1987, on Green Island. Due to the blockage of information, records remain incomplete. As a result, this incident symbolizes the political oppression during the last phase of the Martial Law. Chthonic, for example, addresses this incident in the song 火燒島 SET FIRE TO THE ISLAND in *Bú-Tik* (2013). For an investigation of international and domestic political dynamics culminating to the incident, see the documentary 遺忘與記憶：台灣白色恐怖受難者與家屬口述影像紀錄 *Forgetting and Memories: Recounts of White Terror in Taiwan* (2011) by Sieh Guang Cheng (謝光誠).

If one watches the video, it does not take long to realize that *FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?* contains another intentional perversion. The video is composed of close-up shots of an illustration, part of which is used as the album art. Prior to solos 2 and 3 the video focuses on two images, of radioactive waste and of a gun lying on blood-stained ground, referencing respectively to Orchid Island (蘭嶼) where radioactive waste is dumped, and to Green Island (綠島) where political prisoners were kept. Obviously, both references intend to bring attention to the political oppression of the Taiwanese. During solo 3, a skull-like face uncannily emerges from the land. During 7/D/hook, the camera first turns to a human head on the ground, its mouth wide open, then slowly spans above and gradually reveals a flower blossoming from the head and a devil roaming the ground. In the end, this soil and the island appealed to are simultaneously haunted and haunting, as is indicated by the ending, panoramic shot of *FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?*



Ending shot of *FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?* whose visual focuses are the bloody flower and the skull⁶²

While the last shot of the music video stresses the hauntology and spectrality of Taiwan, the album art of *If There is a Flower Called Justice* stresses what it takes for justice to be achieved, by associating the bloody flower, the head with a wide open mouth, and the character 花 (*hue* in Taiwanese, *hua* in Mandarin), which means flower.

⁶² 14 Mar. 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gul5fH_SKA.



Album art of *If There is a Flower Called Justice* portraying a flower blossoming from a Taiwanese who also roams the soil as a devil⁶³

A bloody flower blossoms as the tongue of the head of a dead Taiwanese person with his or her mouth wide open. The implication is that the Taiwanese, speaking but not heard, vocalizing but voiceless, roam the ground like devils who have suffered violent deaths and not been properly buried. The message of FLOWER FOR JUSTICE? and its album *If There is a Flower Called Justice* is that for justice to blossom, in whatever evanescent manner, it takes a bloody price, and that this is a never-ending pursuit. The flower's cycle(s) of blossoming and withering guarantees the eternal return of the repressed and oppressed Taiwanese.

For any scholar studying Taiwanese metal, a vexing question is how to do justice to this wide-open mouth, the tongue, and the bloody flower growing from it—a flower/Taiwanese in torment, struggling to speak out.⁶⁴

iii.

Political Activism and Some Problematics of Taiwanese Metal

TAKAO and FLOWER FOR JUSTICE? demonstrate how the sonorous cosmos of all beings allows

⁶³ 1 June 2015, streetvoice.com/BurningIslandTW/songs/album/97262661/.

⁶⁴ Here I am referring to the classic Taiwanese song *TORMENT OF A FLOWER*, see footnote 48.

Taiwanese music to alternatively envision voices, sounds, and images, and to variously explore the identities and subjectivities of Taiwan. By making use of the phonic-imagistic unconsciousness carried by a flower that continues to speak and bloom, both songs reflect on what it means and takes to be Taiwanese. This is a shared concern in all six Taiwanese songs discussed in this chapter. Both arrive at quite similar conclusions despite differences in tones: Taiwanese people do not give up the desire to stand and speak as Taiwanese. Internationally speaking, this desire concerns the injustice that in many international gatherings, the use of the very terms “Taiwan” and “Taiwanese” is not allowed. Domestically speaking, it concerns struggles between the Taiwanese people who seek a voice and justice for Taiwan.

In the Taiwanese context of double oppression—of international voicelessness and internal traumatization—poles of double power always go hand in hand, cutting both ways, as is captured in *FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?*. The torment emerges from the necessity to act as a voice for Taiwan and the awareness of how this very act oppresses fellow Taiwanese people. This has appeared, again and again, as shown in this chapter, through manners of dramatization, extremity, and perversion. In *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* and *FUNERAL*, songs that deal with religions orienting people’s ways of life, this torment appears in the latter’s acting out of an all-encompassing (bio)political manipulation. In *JUST NOT MEANT TO BE* and *TAKAO*, songs that deal in part with the Japanese rule, this torment is expressed as ambivalence and anxiety. In *SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT* and *FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?*, songs that deal with extreme violence in a not-so-distant past, extreme reminders are needed to prevent the Taiwanese from falling back to forgetting and from repetitions of tragedy.

Having explained what propels the extremity in Taiwanese metal, I will now clarify the socio-cultural and political hegemony involved in the Taiwanese metal scene. As for cultural hegemony, it should be recalled that the issue of languages is a recurring one in the works of Chthonic. The issue also shows itself, however, in the Taiwanese and English album titles of *政治* (politics) and *Battlefields of Asura* that I discussed in the Introduction. In this chapter, the issue can be detected in both *SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT* and *TAKAO*. Both are much more moderate in their tone and lyrics in the English versions, but also preserve messages in English in the Taiwanese (*SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT*) or Taiwanese in the English (*TAKAO*). The ability to use English (or other dominant, non-sinophonic languages) is a form of cultural capital not accessible to all, and is arguably a privilege for some Taiwanese, especially males and usually of Han ethnicity, from the middle and upper classes who have benefitted from industrialization (Li 94). This cultural-economic background enables members of these classes to re-interpret the metal subculture in a Taiwanese context. That said, the political aspects of the “origin” of metal in Taiwan is that it was introduced by US soldiers deployed in Taiwan, along with rock and punk, as a cluster of musical genres that the KMT dared not ban.⁶⁵ Although metal, rock, and punk all contributed to the rapid democratization since the late 1990s, rock and punk suffered from mainstream popularization. Taiwanese metal, on the other hand, holds on to an idealized elite

⁶⁵ Li focuses extensively on dynamics involved in metal’s development in Taiwan, see especially chapter four 挖掘一段若隱若現的歷史：甚麼是重金屬樂？“An Obscure History: What is Metal Anyway?” Wang also notes the ambiguous boundary between rock, punk, indie, and metal in Taiwan, and points out that these genres appeal to the urban middle class. For a scholarly overview of the roles of socio-cultural, ethnic, and political dynamics in Taiwan’s democratization, readers are recommended to consult *The ‘Republic of China’ and the Politics of Taiwanization: the Changing Identity of Taiwan in Postwar East Asia* (2014) by Wakabayashi Masahiro.

identity, its deviance and marginality targeting larger politics, norms, and the mainstream as a whole.

This is why Li, Wang, and Chu variously criticized metal for its intellectual elitism (Li 95), cultural elitism (Chu 125), and Han nationalism (Wang 88). Commenting on a dispute over the term Taiwanese metal as “Taiwanese/localized metal” or the “larger metal tradition in Taiwan,” Li points out that this seemingly straightforward local versus global argument in fact encapsulates layers of power struggles in Taiwanese metal (151-53). In my opinion, the very reoccurrence of this dispute indicates that it is by nature symptomatic, stemming from scenic members’ anxieties about how their political acts always cut both ways. Put differently, this black-and-white dispute is a defense mechanism through which members express their anxiety and maintain distance from their irrationality.

With the above dynamics in mind, it is not surprising that a common but not always benign Taiwanese practice in the scene is a form of double-edged “bad humor,” that manifests itself by playing with language or playing as the devils. Take, for example, two related, once prevalent slang words: gay-假, that I came across, and homo-猴魔, that Li came across in his interviews with scenic members. Both words have a distinctive political and patriarchal bent. In Taiwanese, fake 假 is pronounced similar to gay in English; it refers to members who pretend to be interested in politics, often used in interchange with the phrase Li observed: 迷弟 or 迷妹, meaning juniors (弟 or 妹) who are fans/lost (迷) (128). Homo-猴魔, then, is a reference to the monkey king/devil in the classic *Journey to the West*,⁶⁶ which is pronounced in Mandarin similar to homo (shortened from homosexual); it refers to elite members who sincerely or authentically engage with politics (Li 127). In both cases, the diminishment of masculinity and human subjectivity reverses the commonly-heard political rhetoric in Taiwan that political oppression is castration, but retains the rhetoric’s power to hurt. Queer myself, I found that bad humor of this kind exemplifies metal’s politics of exclusion-inclusion and selective irony (also see Chapter One).

Yet, I am not jettisoning Taiwanese metal. No doubt, despite the political complexity, Taiwanese metal’s actively engagement with politics replicates metal’s overall problematics. On the other hand, the acute awareness of one’s potential role as an accomplice to oppression and violence—captured by the slogan “everything is political and no one stands outside politics”—means that the majority of Taiwanese metal members are willing to address, discuss, and rectify issues often shunned in the larger metal community. This willingness to engage in often uncomfortable dialogues is the political ability of Taiwanese metal.

4.

Resonances—Personal and Political

I am nearing the end of this homecoming chapter that is underpinned by my passionate political engagement with Taiwan and Taiwanese metal. Before I conclude, however, I want to linger a while and briefly recap the Taiwanese songs I have discussed. Although they may be dissonant

⁶⁶ For political-religious propaganda and homoeroticism in *Journey to the West*, see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journey_to_the_West.

in the sense that, one way or another, the songs always end in perversion and hauntology, they still resonate with each other, in that they all mirror, echo, and give voices to the memories, histories, and worlds of the Taiwanese. After all, are these songs not part of the Taiwanese soundscapes and the sonorous cosmos where all beings of past, present, and future coexist harmonically (although not necessarily harmoniously)?

To a certain degree, my earlier hearing of the songs as cries and screams by human and non-human beings of all sorts, in vengeance and pain, involves myself playing the devil. Driven by my anxiety to voice a Taiwan that I remember as the ghost island, I give in to my desire, and would like to set the evanescence of Taiwan and Taiwanese metal on fire. I would like to reconceptualize, or better, re-remember one more modality of Taiwan, as “the desert island,” in drawing inspiration from Tom Conley’s reading of Gilles Deleuze’s early essay “The Desert Island.”

The desert island . . . becomes the emblematic place where there can be perceived originary myths and the concurrent forces that generate them. Once it is thought of in this way the desert island becomes the vital space of creative difference and repetition. (217)

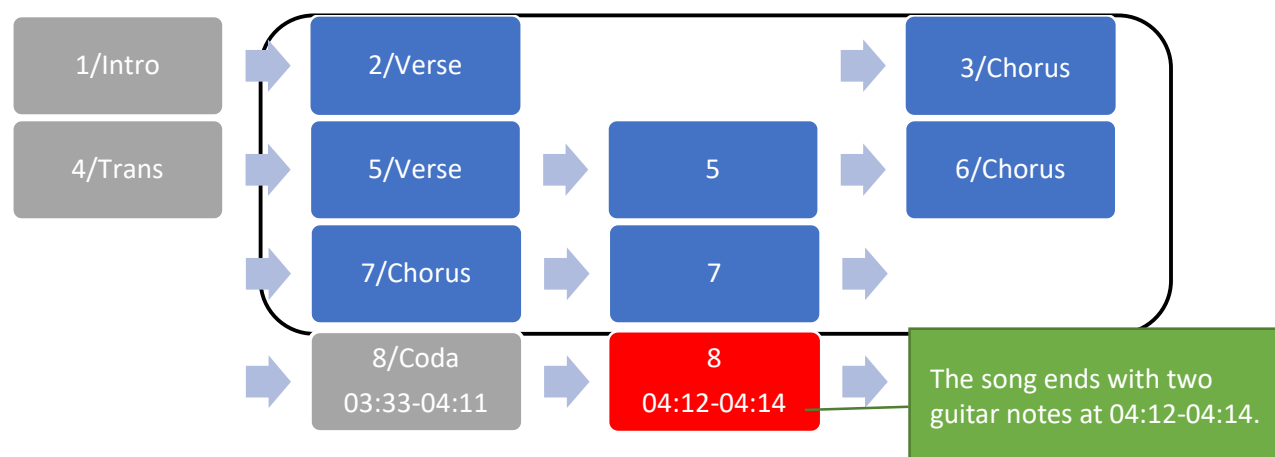
Although Conley has Deleuze in mind when he maps the desert island, I suggest that Taiwan can also be understood as a desert island. According to Conley, the desert island is not necessarily deserted, but is prone to desert itself by failing to re-energize its originary myth, thus losing and destroying it (215-17). I consider the originary myth in a Taiwanese context as the sonorous cosmos mediated by the soundscapes, and the concurrent forces as the Taiwanese people exploring forms of identity and subjectivity. During explorations, the Taiwanese unconsciousness and its political abilities might be lost. Nevertheless, these do not disappear, but are always here and there, energizing re-articulations, noisy but also lively. This is the vitality of the Taiwan I call home.

i.

ISLAND’S SUNRISE and a Collective “Oh”

Just as I opened this chapter with a religious soundscape, I would like to conclude by returning to the soundscapes of Taiwan, having reconceptualized the spectrality of these as vitality. I have in mind one particular song/soundscape that carries an individual as well as collective sediment: a series of remembrances since the early 2010s and an irrevocable awakening in the Sunflower Movement (太陽花學運) in 2014, during which Taiwanese often sung together ISLAND’S SUNRISE 島嶼天光 by the Taiwanese rock band Fire EX. (滅火器 Fire Extinguisher).⁶⁷ The structure of the song can be visualized as follows:

⁶⁷ ISLAND’S SUNRISE. 28 Mar. 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOgNLY8nDxQ. The Sunflower Movement took place between 18 March and 10 April, 2014, against improper procedures of passing the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (服貿協議). For more information, see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunflower_Student_Movement.



As a protest song composed for the Sunflower Movement, ISLAND'S SUNRISE is simple but subtle. The song builds on and slightly varies the verse-chorus format (in the black circle above) to elaborate on, and emphasize the theme of the Taiwanese people in pursuit of democracy and justice.⁶⁸ The central force of ISLAND'S SUNRISE, moreover, lies in its collective singing as a form of empowerment. In block 5, it is a band member *echoing* with the vocalist ("Can't even recall how many days have passed, *but please don't worry*" and "We are *braver than ever before*"); in 6 with the lines "Dawn is near / Let us sing it out loud" members of Fire EX. sing together, and are joined by crowds in 7 repeating the same lines; in 8, Taiwanese voices collectively reassert their resolution, "Today is the day / For brave Taiwanese." Though its narrative is hopeful and encouraging, as a whole ISLAND'S SUNRISE is a highly ambivalent dialectical dialogue. In 8, following the reassertion, the collective singing continues and repeats the phoneme "oh" for 30 seconds (03:33-04:04), and the song is concluded by two guitar notes at 04:12-04:14. The song is thus a collective vocalization of *phónè*, voicing and resonating with the profound sense of uncertainty felt by the Taiwanese; uncertainty if sunrise and justice will shine upon this island today or tomorrow.

Several forms of textual, musical and visual unconsciousness and references that reoccur throughout this chapter converge in ISLAND'S SUNRISE. There is a flower, in cycle(s) ("Because we know the flower blossoms after winter" cf. FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?); there are unfulfilled dreams ("There are people who are determined to protect our dreams." Cf. TAKAO); there is dawn and sunrise breaking endless darkness and bringing justice, so that the Taiwanese who are on a sea journey can go home ("Once the sun reaches the mountain / Then it's time to go home," cf. FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?, SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT and JUST NOT MEANT TO BE); and there is fire, resonating in my own unconscious short-circuits, but also in the band names Burning Island and Fire Ex., and referenced in the music video of FUNERAL.

In terms of spectrality or vitality, the Sunflower Movement did not end well. It was one of those moments during which state violence returned undisguised, after the lift of the Martial

⁶⁸ Some exemplary lines: "Dawn is near / Let us sing it out loud / Until the rays of hope / Shine upon everyone on this island." The lyrics referred here is the Taiwanese version used during the movement. The official English lyrics can be found in the Appendix.

Law. Since then, thematically speaking, devils could be heard everywhere because there was an angry fire (火) (*hue* in Taiwanese) in people, including me, who do not want to remember the movement's ending in painful cries and blood-stained truncheons, suffered and wielded by fellow Taiwanese people. The phoneme-singing and the sunflower infiltrate into me and bloom in me as a bloody (*hueh*) flower (*hue*) in torment and vengeance as well as in hope.



Photo of sunflowers in cheval de fries during the movement⁶⁹

Do You Hear the People Sing?

Having been through possession, acting out, and re-remembering Taiwan, I now reach the destination of my journey and my passionate political engagement. In this chapter, I showed how voices, sounds, and soundscapes profoundly impact Taiwanese ways of life. I also explained how Taiwanese metal engages with politics by appropriating soundscapes, quite often in intentionally extreme manners, in line with the extremity of the Taiwanese context. The tradition of political activism in Taiwanese metal is not unproblematic. Nevertheless, as I endeavored to explain, in echoing and mirroring, as well as sharing the memories, histories, and worlds of the Taiwanese, Taiwanese metal also assists people to move on and try to prevent repetitions of tragedy. To rephrase it through my own reflection, I consider Taiwanese metal to be an angry fire, energizing and vitalizing flower-life cycle(s). Taken together, the songs discussed in this chapter, and by implication, myself as Taiwanese, are still on a long journey, in search of identity, subjectivity, and a voice, though not necessarily blessed by the gods.

Anxious but determined, uncertain but still hopeful, I am now humming along with my

⁶⁹ 27 Mar. 2014, www.taiwanus.net/news/news/2014/201403270126461656.htm.

home soundscapes that have always been with me, wherever I am. I move on, knowing that even amid darkness, there are sparks of light, flowers blossoming, and my fellow people singing together.



People singing ISLAND'S SUNRISE together on 30 March 2014⁷⁰

⁷⁰ 30 Mar. 2014, photo.chinatimes.com/20140330002990-260803. The photo is now removed from the internet; October 2019.