

SESSION 19 (Papers)

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Claiming Indigenous Sovereignty Online: Ponay's Yuan (Indigenous) Style Cover of Mandopop Songs on YouTube

Since the 2010s, the younger generations of Taiwanese Indigenous musicians developed a new online musical space via Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to present, argue, and celebrate their Indigeneity. In regard to internet, Indigenous studies scholars argue that the more egalitarian technologies provide Indigenous people a space to present themselves, while also being aware of the fetishism and commercial modernity that might misrepresent their Indigeneity (Tan 2017; Duarte 2017). To respond to this discourse, I argue that Taiwanese Indigenous musicians are gaining more power on the internet to self-define their Indigeneity and even refuse the fetishism by challenging the colonial-musical aesthetic to claim their sovereignty. My case study focuses on the Indigenous singer, Ponay and his YouTube channel Ponay's Yuan (Indigenous) Style Cover to discuss how his Mando-pop covers demonstrate the lineage of Taiwanese Indigenous music— from pre-colonial era, the Japanese and Han-Chinese colonial era, to the contemporary popular music scene— to celebrate their Indigeneity. Unlike other Mando-pop cover singers who imitate the original version, the sound of Ponay's keyboard accompaniment reminds the audiences the Indigenous cassette culture, and his vocal style also turns Mando-pop songs into a tribal karaoke style. As such, Ponay unsettles the discourse of power which is dominated by the Han-Chinese aesthetic in the Mando-pop music industry. While it has a long history of fetishizing Indigenous culture, I believe, Ponay's covers take back the power of interpreting and representing Indigeneity in colonizer's music, which is an action of claiming sovereignty in the online and the offline world.

Bio

Chun Chia Tai, a Ph.D. candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of California, Riverside, specializes in diasporic studies, Indigenous studies, and decolonial theories. She is actively engaged with the Pacific Islander and Taiwanese American communities in Southern California. Her master's thesis explored the impact of colonialism and dictatorship on Taiwanese people, focusing on Taiwanese elders participating in a Japanese Song class in Taiwan. Currently, her research is centered on the reggae music of Southern Californian Pacific Islanders, examining the intersection of Blackness and Indigeneity within the diaspora.