Explore the Nostalgia: The New Chinese Dream in Recent Taiwan’s Popular Music

Popular music songwriters-singers in Taiwan have long produced nostalgic songs associated with reminiscences of the remote China during the cold war. However, after the government in Taiwan lifted its martial law in 1987, the increasingly social-economic interactions between Taiwan and Mainland China have somehow brought a new dimension to the writings of Taiwan’s popular music, especially songs associated with the image of China. Many innovative ways have been created to depict this evolving social relationship on music in our time.

This paper traces these styles of recent Taiwan’s popular music that demonstrate elements of nostalgia and/or themes associated with the image of China. Applying the semiotic theory and pentatonic structure, I examine those styles through the lens of: original composition, borrowing skills, adaptation, and transcultural elements. Doing so defines how the popular music songwriters-singers vividly speak their Chinese Dreams as ways to reflect the impact from the sociological and political climate across the Taiwan Strait. As a result, songs become a soft power that bridges the gap and facilitates people’s understanding of another culture’s social background. This discussion will focus on new millennium works from Jay Chou, David Tao, Leehom Wang and Jody Chiang.

By defining the styles that recent Taiwan’s popular songwriters-singers portray in their engagement with current social conditions, this paper concludes with a retrospective of the complicated Chinese history from the last century. Taiwan’s popular music has presented a remedy to heal the historic trauma that has divided Mainland China and Taiwan since 1949.