

ARTICLES

Startled Stomach: Contemporary Indigeneity and Sensorial “Culture Shock” in Aljenljeng Tjaluvie’s Paiwan Pop Music

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Introduction

This essay expands on a moment of what I term “bodily experienced culture shock” in the music video for “Minetjus” by Paiwan pop artist Aljenljeng Tjaluvie, with a particular focus on how this shocking moment challenges notions of cultural and sensorial consumption. In 2016, Aljenljeng ended a thirteen-year hiatus and returned to the pop music scene in Taiwan with *Vavayan*, her first solo album, sung entirely in the Paiwan language. Formerly a Mandopop singer, Aljenljeng used to be known by the Mandarin stage name Abao 阿爆 and sang only in Mandarin Chinese.¹ Her choice to compose and sing in the East dialect of Paiwan (hereafter East Paiwan) for *Vavayan* therefore signals a departure from Mandopop culture and its lyrical paradigm, which normalized Mandarin monolingualism as both the index of musical contemporaneity in Taiwan and the lingua franca of Mandopop’s internationalization during the 1990s and early 2000s. I argue that Aljenljeng’s groundbreaking Paiwan-language pop music undermines this paradigm by immersing pop music listeners in what Stó:lō musicologist Dylan Robinson (2020) terms the “sensate sovereignty” of Indigenous musical life, thus countering Mandopop’s convention of refashioning Indigenous artists as Mandopop idols by assimilating them into Mandarin-sung pop music or simply extracting Indigenous melodies as linguistically illegible compositional ornaments.²

To lay the groundwork, I explore Aljenljeng’s turn toward her mother language as an effort to disrupt both Mandopop’s consumption of Indigenous music in Taiwan and the Han-centrism that underpins the island nation’s settler structure of feeling. I argue that Aljenljeng’s intervention disrupts settler dominance in Taiwan’s pop music not only by reinterpreting pop music idioms in the Paiwan language but also, and perhaps more importantly, by centring Indigenous notions of music and musical engagement as quotidian affective experiences of pop music. That is, the significance of her decision to sing in Paiwan rather than Mandarin Chinese or English when creating hip-hop, R&B, or techno music is more than just linguistic; by singing in Paiwan, she is advocating for a paradigm of pop music perception in which music is to be felt in any number of settings as the listener dances along with it. Her Paiwan-language music explores the significance of active listening and responding to music in such settings such as gospel events, weddings, or elementary school classrooms as the primary, instead of alternative, method of experiencing pop music. This shift in focus brings about structural changes to the binary roles of music creators and consumers that have dominated the sensory experience associated with Mandopop.

My exploration of Mandopop’s and Aljenljeng’s Paiwan turn is rooted in my personal relationship to place. I came to this work as a descendant of settlers who arrived in Taiwan during various historical

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periods. Born shortly before martial law was lifted in Taiwan in 1987, I grew up witnessing the twilight of authoritarianism. As a result, I have always felt the push and pull of an internal tension between dependence on order and an impulse toward rebellion. While studying at the National Taiwan University, my research focused on *butoh*, delving into the abject bodies and stigmatization of diseases within the context of Japanese colonization in Taiwan. I was unaware of my position in settler colonialism or my role in Indigenous activism until I left Taiwan and began studying in the United States. Experiencing decentring and alienation as an immigrant prompted me to rethink my never-questioned Taiwanese identity and its relationship to Indigenous rights and sovereignty. During my doctoral studies in the United States, I encountered postcolonial and decoloniality theories, which led me to further interrogate settler accountability and responsibility both within Taiwan and in a diasporic context. My research on Mandopop and Indigenous music represents an effort to engage in decolonizing interventions and confront my limitations in learning from experiences different from my own.

Mandopop's engagement with Indigenous artists and materials functioned, until Aljenljeng's Paiwan turn, through what Robinson describes as the logic of "inclusionary music or performance," which "is more concerned with importing Indigenous content and increasing representation than redefining the structures of inclusion" (2020, 6). One example can be found in "Song for Jolly Gathering" 歡聚歌 by New Formosa Band 新寶島康樂隊, released in 1995. The song celebrates ethnic harmony, and its well-known intro adapts a Puyuma work song commonly known as the "weeding song" into a techno version. The song consists of sections sung in two languages connected respectively to the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the band members—Chen Sheng 陳昇 sings in Hokkien, and Huang Lian-yu 黃連煜 in Hakka—and the weeding song serves as the transition bridging these two sections. Neither the melody nor the lyrics of the weeding song are listed or mentioned in the credits (New Formosa Band 1995). Such inclusionary performances, as Robinson argues, merely seek to "fit" Indigenous artists and sounds into "classical compositions and performance systems" in pursuit of a "display of equality" (2020, 6). Starting with *Vavayan*, however, Aljenljeng introduces the Paiwan production paradigm and creative identity she grew up participating in. I argue that her works create a productive affective disorientation that further reveals the normalization of the Mandarin language and settler listening practices in Taiwanese pop music. In contrast to Mandopop's tendency to listen to Indigenous music as rural and traditional, Aljenljeng does not seek to replicate traditions but instead presents a Paiwan-centred and contemporary praxis of Paiwan musical tradition. The refusal of extractive practices, such as sampling and cultural appropriation, serves here as her strategy for Indigenous sensate sovereignty.

My investigation also addresses the materiality of music and the musical environment, paying attention to embodiment and music as an experiential phenomenon. I argue that Aljenljeng's musical practice should be approached not as an anthology of her works but rather as a "soundstage," an acoustic space-time, that emerges between the artist and the listener(s) during the process of music-making and listening. Music is a texture instead of a text in this sense. I draw on musicologist Christopher Small's notion of "musicking" to explore this dimension of her music. The term *musicking* presents music not as a noun but as a verb, engaging "what people do as they take part in a musical act" (1998, 8). Here, music and musicking include all who "take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing" (9). The concept emphasizes the dynamic characteristics of each sound/note's immediate emergence and disappearance in space, and how this "movement" demonstrates a site or an experiential phenomenon. The concept also

renders visible the intersections between the auditory and other sensory activities, allowing music to be approached as a holistic and synesthetic experience. The notion of musicking guides my investigation of the sensory, topographic landscape that emerges through Aljenljeng’s music activities and that her audiovisual expressions (such as music videos) particularly aim to facilitate. I will elaborate on this in my analysis of her 2019 music video for “Minetjus” (Tjaluvie 2020).

Before I begin, however, I provide context to understand Aljenljeng’s musicking through a brief overview of the history of her nation, the Paiwan people, within Taiwan.

Taiwan: Historical and Ethnic Background

Taiwan, an island located southeast of present-day China, was ceded to Japan after the defeat of the Qing Dynasty in the Qing-Japanese War of 1895. This marked the beginning of fifty years of Japanese colonization. Prior to 1895, Taiwan had largely been considered remote and isolated by various imperial powers. Although it played a role in the conflicts during the transition from the Ming to Qing dynasties (1661–1683) and had been partially colonized by the Netherlands and Spain during the Age of Discovery (1624–1662), it did not receive significant attention from the imperial governments of the Ming and Qing. This situation changed, however, with the Japanese Meiji government’s invasion of Botan 牡丹社, an Indigenous nation located on the island’s southern end, in 1874. This incident exemplified one of Japan’s early efforts to modernize itself in parallel with Western colonial powers through overseas expansion and subsequently pressured the Qing government to initiate preliminary modernization in Taiwan. While intranational power struggles occurred at the ports and settlements scattered along the island’s western coast, the majority of the land on the island was under the rule of several Indigenous first nations (among them the Paiwan), who had inhabited the island for more than thousands of years.

Today, the intricate racial and ethnic demography of Taiwan reflects the diverse colonial histories that have shaped the island. It is commonly accepted that Taiwan is home to five main groups: the Indigenous peoples, Hokkien descendants, Hakka descendants, *waisbengren* (often referred to as “mainlanders”), and Taiwanese new immigrants.³ Within this framework, contemporary discussions about Indigeneity in Taiwan cannot be reduced to an Indigenous versus non-Indigenous dynamic; indeed, relationships, alliances, and rivalries between and among the three settler groups from China are dynamic and nuanced.

The Indigenous peoples of Taiwan, members of sixteen nations, speak a variety of Austronesian languages. According to the national census, as of the end of March 2024, the total number of Indigenous peoples in the country is 595,387, accounting for 2.54% of the total population of 23,416,375 in Taiwan (Department of Household Registration 2024). Among them, the Amis have the largest population, followed by the Paiwan and the Atayal. Each of the sixteen nations has distinct cultures and languages.

From the settler perspective, in 1684, the Qing Dynasty officially incorporated Taiwan into its territory, initially as part of Fujian Province. Between the late seventeenth century and the nineteenth century, the Minan settlers, from the Hokkien and Hakka groups, migrated across the strait from the Qing Empire’s southeast corner to establish the earliest Chinese settler communities on the island. During the Japanese colonial period, the Hokkien and Hakka peoples were referred to as the native islanders, or *bontoujin*, by the Japanese imperial government, in contrast to the Japan-

born Japanese. Despite this distinction, the Hokkien and Hakka were considered less authentically Taiwanese compared to the Indigenous peoples. Later in the twentieth century, the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 and the establishment of the Republic of China occurred while Taiwan was under Japanese rule. The island's residents therefore did not share a common historical experience with the people in continental China. United through the structural position of settlers despite their vast differences, the settler communities continue to depend on the occupation of Indigenous lands, and intramural conflicts cast a shadow over the collective oppression of Indigenous nations by successive and ongoing waves of settler colonization.

Indigenous Musicking in Popular Music in Taiwan

“Let’s put it this way: from my experience as a listener, it can be said that this album of Abao’s [*Vavayan*] opens a new path for the mid-1990s boom of ‘Taiwanese new Indigenous songs.’ Who could have imagined that singing rock songs saturated with the fullness of Black soul music in the East Paiwan mother tongue could be so unexpectedly coherent and beautiful?” (Ma 2017).⁴ The above quote is from a description of Aljenljeng’s 2016 album *Vavayan* written and posted on social media by the music critic, writer, and radio personality Ma Shi-fang 馬世芳. In this passage, Ma does not hesitate to show his awe at the beauty and uniqueness of this album, which he attributes to a refreshing combination of music genres (rock and Black soul music) and linguistic choices (lyrics in East Paiwan). That is, for an experienced listener like Ma, the impact of Aljenljeng’s work seems to lie not in her choice of language, music genre, or theme but in how she represents contemporary musical sensibilities in an Indigenous language.

Ma’s remark reveals the assumptive logic of pop music in Taiwan. His surprise makes clear a normalized and heretofore unchallenged mode of listening. That is, until Aljenljeng, pop music in Taiwan used to be, by default, *rarely in* Indigenous languages.⁵ Mandarin Chinese’s hegemonic hold on mainstream pop music’s narrative began roughly in the 1970s as Taiwan’s policies promoting monolingualism helped establish the dominance of Mandarin-language songs as the sole legible representation of musical contemporaneity. This framework dictates that listeners engage with Mandarin songs to grasp a sense of participation in the modern world. To be clear, there have been a number of openly Indigenous-identifying *and* chart-topping pop artists in Taiwan since the 1950s and 1960s, but their rise to prominence among the general public and via mainstream media coverage has largely been facilitated by Mandarin productions rather than ones in Indigenous languages (Tsai, Ho, and Jian 2019, 6–7).⁶ When Indigenous languages were used in pop music in Taiwan, they often served as compositional ornaments and were treated more like humming or vocalization without semantic function. As a result, the Indigenous lyrics were dismissed from meaning-making, whether or not they had explicit lexical meaning.

Ma’s “surprise” over Aljenljeng’s Paiwan-language pop music points to what is and is not legible in pop music in Taiwan. Ma’s surprise certainly is not about language and comprehension, as this concern rarely arises with regard to the works of Japanese or American pop artists, whose languages are equally inaccessible for Mandarin Chinese speakers. Yet behind Ma’s modest comment (stating he is speaking from his experience), the sense of defamiliarization triggered by this Paiwan-language pop production is not an isolated case. As if anticipating this reaction, a sticker was included on the packaging of *Vavayan* that reads: “No need to worry that you don’t understand. Listen to the music, and you’ll get it.” Below, a short description in smaller font promises: “It may not be a familiar language, but the songs will enter your life when the vibes feel right.”⁷



The sticker on *Vavayan* album cover.

The reassuring tone of the message, “no need to worry,” conveys a potential barrier that the album’s marketing team sensed and sought to overcome preemptively. The subsequent text further emphasizes the holistic experience, “the vibes,” music provides while downplaying the significance of the lyrics’ language, suggesting that the team may be concerned that the choice of language on the album could deter listeners from giving it a chance. While it is unclear from the information on the sticker why the marketing team considered the album’s language choice a potential barrier, or what convention of listening, found in pop music in other languages, is now obstructed by Aljenljeng’s Paiwan lyrics, the necessity for such reassurance does indicate an underlying anxiety that Indigenous languages might render the music incomprehensible to the listener. This concern surrounding music’s legibility is exclusive to the *integration* of pop genres and Indigenous languages because similar apprehension occurs less with Indigenous-language productions more explicitly categorized as folk music, such as the 2016 folk album *Yaangad* by the Puyuma singer-songwriter Sangpuy Katatepan Mavaliyw, and those productions more easily identified with imported pop cultures but sung in Mandarin Chinese, such as the hip hop or reggae work of Paiwan singer-songwriter Matzka. While Sangpuy and Matzka’s works seem to lend themselves more readily to categorization—whether it be folk, rap, or reggae—the “surprise” evoked by Aljenljeng’s *Vavayan* exposes the limitations of existing music categories as well as the overlooked racial performativity within Indigenous languages. That is, Indigenous languages seem to “racialize” any music performed in them due to Mandarin’s monopolization of pop genres, resulting in Indigenous-language musics being overgeneralized as “ethnic” or world music. Music performed in Indigenous languages therefore does not “sound like” and cannot fit into pop music genres. This slippage resonates with the previously mentioned mode of listening that perceives songs in Indigenous languages as inherently illegible and without semantic meaning. Whatever implications extend from this assumed illegibility, Aljenljeng’s Paiwan-language pop music engenders a defamiliarizing and disorienting auditory experience exactly as her language choice renders this assumption audible. By insisting on remaining “illegible,” yet boldly claiming that the songs in *Vavayan* will “enter your life” on their own terms, Aljenljeng disrupts Mandopop listening norms, in which listeners assume the right to secure control over what they hear.

The Paiwan Family-House as Musicking Space and Aljenljeng’s Musical Journey

Two paradigms are at play in the cultivation of Aljenljeng’s musical language as both affectively Indigenous and pop musicking: commercially oriented 1990s and 2000s mainstream Mandopop productions and the quotidian practice of multicultural popular music in Paiwan musical life. The former marks the context of the professional training Aljenljeng received at the start of her music career and the success of her debut. The latter emphasizes her original musical background and acts

as the focal point for her musicking interventions since her return to the pop music scene in 2016. I approach her interventions in the second phase of her career through her engagement with the Paiwan family unit concept *qumaqan* (family-house).

In the Paiwan language, *family*, *house*, and *family-house* are three words that attend to different dimensions of the concept of family. While all three words can mean “family” according to the context, *kinacemekeljan*, or the term Aljenljeng uses in the lyrics, *kinataqumaqan*, emphasizes kinship based on blood relations.⁸ *Umaq* is the physical building comprising a family residence, and also applies more broadly to any architectural construction. *Qumaqan*, on the other hand, is the main structure of *umaq* and the personified subject of the house where a family lives.⁹ A building for residential use must go through a naming ceremony to transform it from a piece of architecture to a space of human dwelling, a family-house (Ijavuras kadrangian 2021, 74–75). A *qumaqan* obtains the meaning of *family* and *family residence* when it is given a name, as a newborn infant is named by family elders. A named *qumaqan* begins to represent the family living in it and declares familial relationships among the family members. The Paiwan naming system associates persons with family by the name of their family-house instead of a passed-down surname.

Aljenljeng articulated the centrality of the Paiwan family unit, *qumaqan*, in her works for the first time in one of her 2019 songs, “1–10” (Tjaluvie 2019, track 8). Adopting the structure of children’s counting rhymes, the song enumerates the things that bring happiness in her mother’s first-person perspective, using Paiwan domestic references to embed numbers from one to ten into the lyrics. Starting with an ambient vocal that imitates the megaphone sound quality commonly heard in village broadcasts, Aljenljeng announces: “Listen up! / I’m teaching you this song / to count from one to ten.” Then in the intro, the phrase “kinataqumaqan na Paiuan” (this is about a Paiwan family) is repeated.

In terms of word formation, the link between the terms for the family-house, *qumaqan*, and the state of a family, *kinataqumaqan*, is readily audible. Paiwan is a spoken language. The correlation between concepts is often expressed through vocal amalgamation of words and syllables. With *family-house* being woven into the word for *family*, announcing that her song is “about a Paiwan family” and saying the two words simultaneously conveys the idea that, for Aljenljeng, family functions as both methodology and locus for music-making.

The centrality of family and family-house further denotes the priority of collaboration in Aljenljeng’s works. In an interview, Aljenljeng talked about her experience of navigating modern and traditional music genres to find her tunes for singing songs in Paiwan. The point, she insists, is not about the music styles but how close music-making is to everyday life (Liu and Chen 2021). Aljenljeng’s prioritization of quotidian and domestic life is a notable aspect of her Paiwan-pop musicking. The concept of the family-house serves as a focal point for her exploration of the Paiwan worldview, wherein *qumaqan* functions not merely as an abstract site for musical expression but rather as the tangible space that encapsulates the collective experiences of a family. In this context, the meaning of music is to share it with family and friends in a space like one’s *qumaqan*. More importantly, the family-house serves as an Indigenous-centric space outside of settler surveillance. Given that Indigenous houses and households were the focus of settler surveillance and governance, Aljenljeng’s prioritization of daily musical engagement and the sharable quality of music according to the needs of family-centred communities gestures to the ongoing struggle and effort of cultural resurgence.

Aljenljeng's background broadly reflects the experiences of the urban Indigenous population in Taiwan, which burgeoned amid the rapid urbanization and economic boom of the 1980s. Growing up in Kaohsiung, the largest city in southern Taiwan, Aljenljeng has always identified herself as belonging to the Paiwan community in Jialan Village 嘉蘭村, Taitung County, Taiwan.¹⁰ Located in the northern basin of the Taimali River 太麻里溪, the village spans from the foothills of Mt. Kavulungan, the sacred mountain in the Paiwan origin myth from which ancestors originated, and extends eastward to the southeast shore of Taiwan.¹¹ Despite maintaining ties to her family-house in Jialan, Aljenljeng relocated to Kaohsiung with her parents at a young age and has since spent her life travelling between two different geographies: Jialan, associated with her grandparents and Paiwan culture, and Kaohsiung and other cities linked to her education and professional life. The experience of living in and moving across different worlds bestows on Aljenljeng's creativity a quintessential character of cultural diversity (Su 2020).

After graduating high school, Aljenljeng relocated again to Taoyuan to pursue higher education in nursing and worked as a registered nurse before entering the music industry. In 2000, Aljenljeng (who, at the time, went by her Chinese legal name, Chang Jing-wen 張靜雯) joined a TV talent show with her classmate from the nursing school, the Amis singer Tian Xiao-mei 田曉梅. The duo ended up winning first place in the competition and, with it, the opportunity to sign a contract with the then newly established music brand Youyu Records 有魚唱片. After two years of training as idols under the name Abao and Brandy, Aljenljeng and Tian released their first Mandopop album in 2003, which won the Golden Melody Award for Best Vocal Collaboration of the year. The debut also announced Aljenljeng's official use of the nickname "Abao" in public spaces. The name, meaning literally "explode" in Mandarin, refers to Aljenljeng's tightly coiled, Afro-influenced hairstyle that Brandy designed to match Aljenljeng's sonic affinity for African American pop music (Bailingguo News 2020).¹²

Abao and Brandy's seemingly promising future ended abruptly when Youyu Records dissolved unexpectedly in 2004. Brandy changed her career path to producing, while Aljenljeng returned to nursing, maintaining only a minimal connection to the entertainment business.¹³ Aljenljeng's hiatus lasted more than a decade, a separation long enough to break away from Mandopop's apparatus—its marketing strategies, idols, aesthetics, and fan culture—which dictated her previous relationship with the music world. In 2014, Aljenljeng's return to music was prompted by her family's traditional music practice, a comeback which ushered in the second phase of her career. The release of *The East Payuan (Paiwan) Folk and Three Generations* 東排三聲代 in 2014 broke Aljenljeng's silence and acted as a precursor for the Paiwan pop on *Vavayan*, which followed two years later. Initiated as a family project, *The East Payuan (Paiwan) Folk and Three Generations* ("East Payuan Folk") is a self-produced and partially home-recorded album. Its original aim was to preserve the voice of Aljenljeng's *vuvu* (grandmother).¹⁴ Fearing that she might not live to attend all her grandchildren's weddings and provide proper blessings through her singing rituals, Aljenljeng's *vuvu* asked her children to prerecord the songs for future use (Huang 2014).

Aljenljeng comes from a maternal lineage of singers. Her *vuvu*, Micigu, was the leading singer of *gyao* (traditional or ancient songs) in the local Paiwan communities before she passed away.¹⁵ And her late mother, Wang Qiulan 王秋蘭, who also went by the stage name Ay-zing 愛靜 and her Paiwan name Ljegeljege Tjaluljayaz, was one of the Indigenous pop singers who rose to prominence in Indigenous circles during the vinyl boom of the 1970s. Tracks from her records remain on the playlists of local

radio broadcasts across Indigenous neighbourhoods today (Liu and Chen 2021). This family singing tradition, however, was negatively impacted by the Chinese-only mandates in education and the standardized use of Mandarin Chinese in all public spaces before the end of martial law in 1987. These policies brought profound and long-term destruction to the natural language environment of Indigenous languages. Aljenljeng, for instance, does not speak Paiwan as a first language (Bailingguo News 2020). The singing training she received in her adulthood was also tailored to meet the requirements of Mandopop aesthetics and the musicality of Chinese lyrics. The making of *East Payuan Folk* thus holds personal significance for Aljenljeng. It was a journey of learning her mother tongue, and on a broader scale, it sparked a linguistic and cultural movement against settler monolingualism, beginning with telling a Paiwan family's story. The recording process eventually evolved into fieldwork that involved three generations of Aljenljeng's maternal relatives notating, transcribing lyrics, and at last learning to sing their *vuvu*'s songs (Tjaluvie, Wang, and Liang, n.d.). Aljenljeng's mother Ay-zing became Aljenljeng's language coach in this process. The mother-daughter collaboration has been active with the two co-writing most of the lyrics in Paiwan for her two latest albums.

When Aljenljeng returned to music-making in the 2010s, Taiwan's pop music industry was markedly different than it was when she departed in 2004; there was an increasing diversity of music styles, marketing strategies, and performance venues that accompanied the disintegration of monopolizing record labels and the withdrawal of transnational corporations from Taiwan. The industry's decentralization led to a transformation in music's relationship with identity politics: "Small live venues and their associated online bulletin boards, blogs, and file-sharing sites mediated niche tastes in indie music, cultivated ideologies of resistance, and fostered a sense of community" (Tsai, Ho, and Jian 2019, 11). I argue that the recording of *East Payuan Folk* in 2014, which inspired Aljenljeng's exploration of her cultural roots, is indicative of this particular moment in the history of pop music in Taiwan. In many senses, it also explains how this recording project led to her experimentation with Paiwan pop and, ultimately, to a broader pan-Indigenous pursuit of pop music.

Beginning in 2015, Aljenljeng initiated the Nanguaq Project, broadening her Paiwan folk music fieldwork to encompass diverse Indigenous ethnic groups. Similar to ethnomusicology fieldwork, Aljenljeng toured the island, looking for Elders willing to record their singing. Unlike ethnographers who collect and archive the recordings as data to be analyzed, however, Aljenljeng acts on the goal to gather and broadcast. The project is now growing into a long-term publication project for young Indigenous pop artists with the goal of strengthening pan-Indigenous solidarity and cultural influence.

Rehistoricizing Aljenljeng in Pop Music Made in Taiwan

In Shzr Ee Tan's research on Amis singing practice, the ethnomusicologist addresses the urgency for Taiwan Indigenous music studies to build up an Indigenous-centred methodology. She proposes that the Amis term for singing, *ladhiv*, replace the Western-centric notion of music and its Chinese equivalent, *yinyue*.¹⁶ With *ladhiv*, Tan characterizes the Indigenous practice of music as an "ecosystem" and argues that cultural symbiosis more truthfully describes the qualities of the Amis songs and music she examines. Though Tan's research focuses on the musical life in Amis villages, her argument offers a way to reverse the disappearance of the organic musicking dynamics in the research of Indigenous music in Taiwan in general. In this framework, Tan defines the self-standing ecosystem of *ladhiv* as the "commercial and popular music dimensions of Taiwan aboriginal song"

“enjoyed within and without” the Indigenous communities (2012, 177). This definition highlights what was overlooked in the mid-1990s by Indigenous artists in Mandopop and also finds cross-generational connections among Indigenous subjects’ interactions with popular music, whose isolation in language and culture-based taxonomy is itself a phenomenon of colonialism.

To understand Aljenljeng’s impact on both Taiwanese pop music and the musical representation of Indigeneity in Taiwan, Aljenljeng’s musicking activities after her return in the 2010s should be approached from the perspective of Tan’s notion of the multicultural and multilingual “ecosystem” of Indigenous musical life. This perspective amends the limitations of Ma Shi-fang’s inclination to see Aljenljeng’s work as an extension or revival of “the mid-1990s boom of new Taiwanese Indigenous songs.” The latter suggests a Mandarin-centred perspective on pop music history in Taiwan. Although it signifies the rise of publicly Indigenous-identifying idol-singers in Taiwan’s mainstream music market as well as in global Sinophone communities, the expression of Indigeneity is conveyed through the Mandarin language, and the singers’ status falls within the genre of Mandopop, the Mandarin-language pop music. This perspective perpetuates the normalized contrast between the Indigenous-language songs, depicted as traditional and outdated, and those in Mandarin, depicted as contemporary and trendy. It also risks conflating the success of Indigenous artists in Mandopop with the visibility of Indigenous cultures while paradoxically distancing these successful Mandopop productions from Indigenous-language folk songs or “world music.” In Aljenljeng’s work, her training in Mandopop and Paiwan folk songs or the Paiwan language do not separate from one another.

In contrast, Shyr Ee Tan suggests an ecological understanding of music in the analysis of the Indigenous musical life and “the constant re-making of aboriginal identity in relation to song” (2012, 7). Approaching music as a metaphorical ecosystem, Tan argues, helps to address the multicultural sonic symbiosis that forms the musical practice in the Indigenous communities in Taiwan. This approach emphasizes an Indigenous-centred and local-based notion of music that embraces expressions of Indigeneity “in the wider context of intersecting cultural flows.” Indigenous music is therefore “concerned with different interacting dimensions of traditional and contemporary singing activity” (Tan 2012, 7), transcending the racialized divisions of music genres such as pop music, folk songs, or “world music.” In this vein, the cultural and linguistic hybridity in Aljenljeng’s pop music aligns with, though it is not confined by, the mass production of Indigenous singers in the 1960s and 1970s, through which Aljenljeng’s mother achieved popularity among Indigenous communities. This hybridity is premised on the intersection of Japanese *enka*, Hokkien oldies, American pop songs, Indigenous working songs, and Indigenous singing traditions all circulating simultaneously across Indigenous villages (Tan 2012, 177). The significance of the contemporary continuity of Indigenous music traditions in Aljenljeng’s pop music emerges only when we position her musicking within these intricate sonic textures that interweave the auditory experience in Indigenous living spaces, rather than within the context of Mandopop. In other words, what was encompassed under the broad label of “Indigenous pop” in the mid-1990s does not belong to the same system of practice in the 2010s. If the mid-1990s boom signals Indigenous artists entering mainstream Mandopop, the pop music of Indigenous artists in the 2010s gestures toward restoring Indigenous musical lives and the semantics of Indigenous languages to the mainstream pop music scene. The characteristics identified by Ma Shi-fang as innovative and alternative may only appear new as they introduce the long-standing Indigenous practices of popular music to the settler view after years of dismissal.

Compared to *East Payuan Folk* and the early stage of the Nanguaq Project, Aljenljeng’s later works (from 2016 to the present) express a strong inclination toward imported and trendy music genres

and seem to diverge from her interest in traditional music and fieldwork-intensive production. However, the juxtaposition of traditional folk song recordings and an interest in the pop music market that respectively mark the early and later phase of the Nanguaq Project reflect the multicultural and multitemporal nature of the Indigenous musical life. Despite the various genres and styles, music-making on a sharable and collaborative basis serves as the common methodology in both stages of Aljenljeng's work. This continuum, identified by Tan as an ecosystem, finds its embodiment in the significance of the Paiwan family-house, *qumaqan*, in Aljenljeng's musicking and serves as the foundation for Aljenljeng's post-Mandopop creation.

Startled Stomach: Sensate Sovereignty as Strategy of Refusal

“Minetjus” is a song featured in Aljenljeng's second Paiwan pop album, *Kinakaian*, released in 2019. Within this album, the singer-songwriter experiments with a more diverse musical style, incorporating elements of gospel and techno music.¹⁷ In Paiwan, *minetjus* means shock or startle caused by something unexpected, rather than fear or fright. The term can be applied to occasions of both surprise and intimidation (Kuljelje Maljaljaves [Wu Fan], personal communication with author, April 15, 2024). The song “Minetjus” plays out the duality of the feeling of *minetjus* and offers a moment of what I call “bodily experienced culture shock.” It evokes an accelerating, jittery sensation caused by the excitement of gustatory experiences and the unexpected consequences of overly satisfying one's appetite. At the opening of the video for “Minetjus,” Aljenljeng guides the camera into a canopy tent set up in an open field. There is a table full of dishes inside this small gazebo. In a pulsating intro, Aljenljeng and her friends are seen enjoying the banquet by the table: “My vuvu (grandma) misses me. I should go back home for dinner. Some non-Indigenous friends come along. Let's try my granny's specialties.” Questions then arise after the background introduction: “What is the magic in the dishes? How could all the dishes be so delicious?” In response, Aljenljeng proceeds to call out the name of each dish one after another. The same sequence of dishes is pronounced in a rapping manner twice:

izua kimesa ni vuvu a cinavu
 Granny makes steamed millet cakes wrapped in Lavilu leaves,
pinuljacengan, djinukudjuk
 porridge with vegetables and wild herbs, pumpkin and sweet potato cake,
pinilaulj atua valeng
 and millet balls stuffed with salted meat.

(Off Screen)

liav, ljakua malua anga
 Eat all you can eat, but not too much.
minetjus a nu vicuka
 You would get a stomachache.

.....
izua kimesa ni vuvu a qapilj
 Granny makes blood sausages,
vavny a sian pinuljanaqan
 wild boar broth spiced with Decaisne Angelica,
atua valeng atua pangesyuy
 salted meat and coriander in sauce.¹⁸

The repeated calling of the names of the dishes and their maker here seems to act as a form of ritual, an invocation of oral tradition. It performs a speech act where the exact action of calling or rapping brings things into becoming through vocal enunciation. Engaging vocally with the syllables of the dish names connects the act of singing to the way lyrics in Indigenous singing traditions generate both semantic and nonsemantic meaning. Similar to scat singing in jazz, which is too commonly defined as vocal improvisation with “wordless” or “nonsense” syllables, a significant proportion of Indigenous folk songs in Taiwan also involve singing entirely or partially in vocables without specific lexical meanings (Chen 2013, 165). These vocables, while carrying the quintessential characteristics of the singing culture within different Indigenous nations, have a long history of being documented by settler musicologists as meaningless “function words.”¹⁹ Viewing these vocables as function words, as opposed to content words that convey semantic information, leads to the misconception that songs in Indigenous languages lack lyrics or only have lyrics that do not express any content. Amis ethnomusicologist Panay Mulu refutes the notion of function words and argues that these lyrics should be understood as “lining words,” which create meaning through “accentuating melodies and atmospheric flavors” (2004, 164). The use of lining words “represents a form of singing that is non-abstract, non-coincidental, and not solely emotional; it is a meaning-contributive and remarked singing style” (Mulu 2004, 164).

Ethnomusicologist and Taiwanese Indigenous studies scholar Chen Chun-bin, on the other hand, approaches these lyrics as “vocables,” vocal units that not only serve as accentuating components but can also constitute the song itself (2013, 167–69). He builds upon the works of Ming Li-guo and Wu Ming-yi, who stress that the meanings of vocables do not originate from the lyrics but rather from how vocables relate to the participatory circumstances of singing (170). Chen’s theorization of vocables views the song as incomplete from the perspective of lyrics. It is only through what he terms the “interpretative process,” carried out by those who participate in the singing, that a song’s meaning can fully develop and gain recognition. To reach the meaning of a song, participants engage with the circumstance of singing as an immersive sonic reality and cultural arena (188).

These studies provide the framework to think about what it invokes and evokes when Aljenljeng vocally enumerates the dishes in “Minetjus.” The names of the dishes undoubtedly convey semantic meanings as content words (that is, they signify specific dishes); however, I argue that by being uttered, the syllables in the dish names also function as vocables that form the sonic reality for the singer and the listeners. The vocalization of the dish names proceeds fast but evenly in pace, with one name’s end attaching to the beginning of another. The adjoining voiced and voiceless consonants slide and stop as if in incantation, arousing a sensation similar to that of chewing and tasting. At the same time, the electronic beats evoke rhythmical sensations from within the listener’s body, resembling heartbeats or, as the lyrics indicate, the muscle contraction during stomachaches. Just as vocables are employed at Amis ritual sites to summon ancestors’ souls or spirits (Mulu 2004, 165–68), the syllables in the dish names connect musicking bodies to the frequency of immersive vibrations, thereby invoking a space of gathering and the cultural and familial meaning of food-sharing.

The syllables in the dish names resound to affirm the functions of the dishes in Paiwan family and social life and, by summoning gustatory memories, perform a private yet sharable sensate identity within the body. In thinking the meaning of food and banquet, central to Indigenous life and reintroduced by Aljenljeng to the pop music scene, Dylan Robinson’s concept of “sensate sovereignty” as a strategy of “structural refusal” becomes relevant in this conversation. Recognizing refusal as a central tenet of Indigenous studies, as emphasized in the work of Audra Simpson, David

Garneau, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Glen Coulthard, Robinson concludes that the refusals they undertake primarily pertain to content—withholding information, affirming and centring Indigenous perspectives, and demarcating Indigenous sovereignty within academic writing (Robinson 2020, 21–23). Besides such “content refusal,” however, Robinson distinguishes another form of refusal based on structural blockade. “Actions of structural refusal,” he posits, “are formal and aesthetic strategies that impede Indigenous knowledge extraction and instrumentalization” (23). Considering structural refusal as “forms of sensate sovereignty,” Robinson looks at forms that “act as a limit of knowledge,” that which “is felt viscerally, proprioceptively, and affectively beyond the page” (24).

To demonstrate the strategy of sensate sovereignty, Robinson raises the significance of food-sharing occasions in his expansion of David Garneau’s concept of “irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality”:

Irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality are gatherings, ceremony, nêhiyawak (Cree)—only discussions, kitchen-table conversations, email exchanges, et cetera, . . . are performed without settler attendance. It is not a show for others but a site where people simply are, where they express and celebrate their continuity and figure themselves to, for, and with one another without the sense that they are being witnessed by people who are not equal participants. (Garneau 2016, 27)

Returning to the banquet in Aljenljeng’s song, it is noteworthy that although the occasion is not “without settler attendance” (the lyrics enunciate that the friends invited to grandmother’s banquet are *pairang* [Sinophone settlers]), the core of the Indigenous gathering as an irreconcilable space is embodied in the video’s cast—everyone showing up in the video is Aljenljeng’s friend in real life, and they all belong to Indigenous nations.²⁰ It is evident that the ensemble does not represent the “friends” mentioned in the lyrics who are invited to the banquet; instead, they are members within Aljenljeng’s family-friend circle. The significance of the banquet as a Paiwan-centred, pan-Indigenous space is celebrated through the ensemble’s food-sharing and the sovereignty of the space.

We can certainly question whether the camera represents the perspective of the invited non-Indigenous guest(s), and how in this way the settler perspective may still dominate the camera view with a disembodied, scopophilic permeation. Yet Aljenljeng’s “rap” of the name of the dishes obstructs any physically detached way of listening. The rap speaks to both the content and structural refusal as anticolonial strategy here. On the one hand, as much as the music and the food might seem palatable according to the Mandarin and settler audiation and gustatory orientation, there is no way to seamlessly consume either the music or the food without confronting the attack of an irreducible unfamiliarity. The unfamiliarity simultaneously speaks to the pop song and rap sung in Paiwan, a combination unfamiliar to Mandarin speakers, and the ingredients, spices, and seasoning logics of Paiwan dishes. Suffering from “bodily experienced culture shock,” the settler ear and stomach must adapt to their decentred positions and confront the newly acquired otherness when entering this space of Indigenous knowledge and the Indigenous framework of feeling. The rhythmical sensations evoked by the beats also subvert the extractivist logic that regards the non-Indigenous listener or eater as the subject of consumption. In this context, the vibration inevitably enters and transforms the listener in a visceral sense, like how food enters and transforms the organism that ingests it. The settler becomes the receptive object in the act of listening/eating, being infiltrated and moved.

On the other hand, the strategy of content refusal is also at play here. It withholds knowledge and ownership—the decision of the Paiwan banquet hosts to open and share the space with “pairang” does not alter the inherent irreconcilability of the occasion. Like some Indigenous seasonal rites that grant minimal and peripheral participation to visitors by asking outsiders to keep out of the ritual space and observe quietly, the space of Aljenljeng’s banquet also opens to “pairang” only within defined boundaries. These boundaries are unspoken but are performed and felt through the body.

“Eat all you can eat, but not too much,” the lyrics advise, “otherwise—minetjus a nu vicuka.” “Vicuka” is the stomach, and the verb for being shocked, “minetjus,” refers to the unexpected disturbance in the stomach brought forth by the attempt to unlimitedly satiate one’s appetite. Aljenljeng confirms in an interview that she was inspired to write this song by an actual incident.

One time, I brought along a Han photographer for fieldwork. We had the opportunity to taste djinukudjuk, a traditional pumpkin and sweet potato cake, made by an elderly person. . . . My friend found it incredibly delicious and couldn’t stop eating. The elderly person then spoke to me in Paiwan, telling me to advise my friend to eat in moderation, or else his stomach might be startled. (Luo 2020)

What causes stomachache in this case is not just eating but overeating without an awareness of the line between the eater and the eaten object, the understanding that one has limits and should not exceed their capacity. Even when the guest has no malicious intention, as is the case portrayed in this song, the host’s warning serves as a reminder to the guest that they cannot, and should not, see themselves as ready to obtain all. Reading the warning with Robinson’s notion of “hungry listening,” what is rendered tangible through the rebellion of Paiwan food in a settler stomach is perhaps a normalized settler dispossession of Indigenous cultures, a presumed right to acquire and appropriate. In his identification of settler colonial forms of perception, Robinson employs the Halq’eméylem word *shxwelítemelh*, which translates to “hunger,” to render visible this settler’s desire for acquisition and consumption.

The word emerges from the historical encounter between *xwélmexw* (Stó:lō people) and the largest influx of settlers to the territory during the gold rush. In 1858, thousands of *xwelítem* (largely men) arrived in a bodily state of starvation, and also brought with them a hunger for gold. In the context of this book, I use *shxwelítemelh* to refer to a form of perception: “a settler’s starving orientation.” (Robinson 2020, 2)

Drawing on Leanne Simpson and Naomi Klein’s words, that “extraction isn’t just about mining and drilling, it’s a mindset—it’s an approach to nature, to ideas, to people,” Robinson positions the settler way of perception as “hunger” and asks: “How might we instead hear the resourcing of Indigenous music as the settler colonial resource extraction that it is?” (2020, 13–14). Aljenljeng’s “Minetjus” resonates with this question through the intertextuality between food and music. The song audibly and viscerally exposes the guest’s unchecked appetite as stemming from anticipation of absolute satisfaction, or more implicitly, the settler sense of entitlement to insatiable desires. In other words, the Paiwan food’s appeal thrills the guest so much because it signifies the excitement of discovery and harvest, just like the Indigenous music and cultures. With an understanding yet firm attitude, Aljenljeng’s amusement at the elderly person’s concern that the friend’s way of eating might disrupt their own stomach establishes boundaries. Paiwan food refuses to be easily digested. It conveys that, much like an unignorable physical reaction to overeating such as a stomachache, one

ultimately “feels” the consequences of listening to Indigenous music through the perception mode that caters to the settler desire for extraction. Therein lies a hidden message to mainstream Mandopop that used to extract only the melody from Indigenous songs while erasing their cultural contexts and lyrics’ meanings. It renders visible, in Robinson’s words, “the unmarked normativity of listening” and “the ways in which the listening continuum has historically been consigned to a framework wherein one is listening well if one is able to capture the content of what is spoken, or the ‘fact’ of musical form and structure” (2020, 38).

For non-Indigenous listeners familiar with Mandopop, listening to “Minetjus” entails accepting a positional shift from mere music consumers to a physically involved musicking participant. The listener must allow the “stomachache” to occur within their body, permitting the sonic reality created upon the integrated vibration of the naming of the food and the melodies to penetrate, enter, and transform themselves on the visceral level. This experience prompts the emergence of an unfamiliar self from one’s awareness of being immersed in another culture and the subsequent loss of certainty. Listeners are opened up to change. “Minetjus” portrays and summons a space where music derives meaning according to both the affective and cognitive protocols of Paiwan music and cultural life. This space demands that the listener engage with music through their body—the body that is shaken, agitated, and transformed by the unknown and by the Indigenous knowledge consciously kept illegible to them. In essence, “Minetjus” initiates a process of defamiliarization to the listeners of Mandopop; the listeners cannot avoid their positionality, a positionality that used to be invisible under the settler normative trafficked in Mandopop.

Notes

1. Mandopop refers to popular music sung in Mandarin Chinese. Contemporary commercialized Mandopop is generally recognized as beginning around 1980 and drawing on musical traditions from the early twentieth century. Commercial production of popular music shifted from Shanghai to Hong Kong and Taiwan during and after the Second World War and the Chinese Civil War. This article focuses on the 1980s and 1990s, when Mandopop flourished. During this same period, Taiwan’s pop music industry benefited from a stable, young audience cultivated by the campus folk-song movement of the 1970s, and the productions made in Taiwan gained favour with Mandarin-speaking communities around the world. For the definition for contemporary Mandopop, see Mozkowitz (2009). For the historicization of Mandopop, see Tsai, Ho, and Jian (2019)..

2. Sensate sovereignty is a decolonial approach to listening (Robinson 2020). The concept captures how Indigenous communities reclaim and assert their sovereignty through sensory experiences, particularly emphasizing the significance of sound and listening practices. Within Robinson’s theorization of refusal as a strategy of resistance, sensate sovereignty underscores the ways in which artistic and sensory forms serve as obstructions to extractive settler mode of perception and “provide a structure of knowledge sharing for Indigenous folks to enter into” (24).

3. Hokkien refers to both a subgroup of ethnically Han Chinese as well as the dialect of the Minnan Chinese language spoken primarily in Fujian province, southeastern China. Hakka refers to another subgroup of Han Chinese with a unique migration history. Believed to have originated from northern China, the Hakka people began migrating southward to various regions and countries over centuries. The Hokkien and Hakka established significant overseas diasporas in Taiwan between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, forming the “earlier” settlers in contrast to the waishengren or “mainlanders,” who migrated to Taiwan from China alongside the Chinese Nationalist government after 1945, particularly after 1949. The most recently identified group, Taiwanese new immigrants 新住民, refers to individuals who have relocated to Taiwan from other countries from the 1990s onward seeking work, education, marriage, or asylum. The term does not indicate a homogenous ethnicity but encompasses immigrants from diverse cultural backgrounds.

4. Original text: 這麼說吧：阿爆這張專輯，就我自己聆聽的經驗，算是替 1990 年代中期以來「台灣原住民新創歌謠」風潮，打開了一條全新的道路。誰能想到，用東排灣族母語唱浸透了黑人靈魂樂風格的搖滾，竟是這樣行雲流水、美不勝收？
5. Other earlier examples, such as the Paiwan singer-songwriter Matzka's reggae debut song "Mado Vado" (2010) and the Amis singer-songwriter Ado Kaliting Pacidal's techno dance hit "Pangcah" (2014), are arguably singular occurrences. The former is the only Indigenous-language song on a predominantly Mandarin album. The latter was released as a single.
6. As Mandarin monolingualism began to exert significant influence from the 1960s into the 1970s, songs in Indigenous languages ceased to serve as vehicles for emotional expression for the post-war Mandarin-speaking generation (Huang 2019, 66). However, it is worth noting that interpreting Indigenous pop songs in Mandarin Chinese and using this approach to generalize Indigenous pop music is a phenomenon specific to the settler cultural perspective, for the music environments of Indigenous communities have always been multilingual.
7. Original text: 雖然可能不是熟悉的語言，但一旦頻率對上，這首歌就進入你的生活裡了。Sticker on *Vavayan* album cover (Tjaluvie 2016), advertisement, translated by Yi-Jen Yu.
8. The word *kinacemekeljan* incorporates two independent words: the noun for "married couple," *cekelj*, and the verb for "a couple constituting a family," *cemekelj*. This connection to marriage and procreation underscores the word's emphasis on family as a group based on lineal consanguinity. A synonymous regional variation, *kinataqumaqan*, also refers to family based on blood relatives. The term is more narrative, however, as it also refers to the financial condition or state of a family (Kuljelje Maljaljaves [Wu Fan], Paiwan language lesson to the author, April 21, 2024).
9. In modern everyday conversation, *qumaqan* most commonly refers to the "indoor," as opposed to the "outdoor." The term is also used to refer to the place where the ancestral worship altar is located, which extends to the concept of the main living room in modern living spaces (Kuljelje Maljaljaves [Wu Fan], Paiwan language lesson to the author, April 21, 2024).
10. While predominantly inhabited by the Paiwan peoples, Jialan Village is far from an ethnically and politically homogenous entity. Rather, it consists of seven Paiwan nations, along with the smaller Xinfu Community, which is located closer to the mountain range and inhabited by an eastern subgroup of the Rukai peoples. According to the 2017 census (Ministry of the Interior, ROC), Jialan is home to approximately 1,500 individuals across 474 households, establishing itself as one of the most significant Paiwan agglomerations in Taiwan. See Ministry of the Interior, ROC (2017).
11. Mt. Kavulungan, also known as Taimu Mountain 大武山, belongs to the southern mountain group in the Central Mountain Range that runs vertically through the centre of the island of Taiwan. Over three thousand metres above sea level, Mt. Kavulungan represents the highest sacredness in the origin myth of the Paiwan and Rukai peoples living in Jialan.
12. Scholarship on Taiwanese pop music's appropriation of Black music and styles includes Schweig (2022); Lin (2019); and Tan 2012.
13. In 2012, having left the pop music scene for five years, Aljenljeng was invited by Taiwan Indigenous Television to join the hosting team. From 2012 to 2016, she worked in the hospital during the week and recorded programs in the TV station on the weekends. See Su (2020).
14. *Vuvu* stands for both grandparents and grandchildren in Paiwan. Prefix case markers distinguish between references to grandparents and grandchildren.
15. Micigu was also known by the Mandarin name Liang Qiumei 梁秋妹. She is addressed as Micigu among friends and family. The name Micigu is phonetically translated from Japanese, reflecting the fact she was born

and raised in Japanese-occupied Taiwan (Aljenljeng Tjaluvie, “Re: Several Questions,” email to author, November 9, 2021).

16. Ladihw is also spelled radiw. See “Radiw,” Taiwan-Austronesian Indigenous Words and Narrations, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://web.klokah.tw/vocabulary/index.php?d=2&c=23&n=02>.

17. Around the 1960s, Christian missionaries made inroads into the Paiwan communities, leading to the integration of Christianity as a major religious presence alongside traditional animistic belief systems. The practice of singing Christian hymns translated into Paiwan or Mandarin Chinese is commonplace during church gatherings. The gospel song “Thank You,” featured on the album *Kinakaian* (Tjaluvie 2019) stems from Aljenljeng’s aspiration to compose music for her fellow Paiwan people to use during their church assemblies.

18. Lyrics by Aljenljeng Tjaluvie and Wang Qiulan (Ay-zing), “Minetjus,” track 5 on *Kinakaian* (Tjaluvie 2019). The explanations of the dishes’ contents are from the lyrics’ official English translation on Aljenljeng’s YouTube channel (Tjaluvie 2020).

19. The influential musicology project, Folk Song Collection Movement 民歌採集運動, hosted by ethnomusicologist Hsu Tsang-houei 許常惠 and Shi Wei-liang 史惟亮 in the late 1960s, provides the archival foundation for post-war Indigenous music studies in Taiwan. In their archive, the Indigenous folk songs are often listed as “function word songs” 虛詞歌謠. While elderly individuals interviewed by ethnomusicologists during fieldwork often indicate that the lyrics of the songs they sing do not have a specific meaning, less attention has been given to how syllables without lexical or narrative function still contribute to meaning-making based on the manner in which songs are sung during specific occasions. On how the elderly individuals explain the lyrics as not having concrete meanings, see Chen (2013, 166).

20. The ensemble comprises dancers from the Bulareyaung Dance Company, with whom Aljenljeng shares a long-standing and creatively collaborative friendship.

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