

9 Noisy co-existence

Contestations of *renao* and *zaoyin* amidst Taiwan's noise control system

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Gary, the head of an environmental inspection team in northern Taiwan, sat down to talk to me one afternoon about the challenges of managing noise. He said in a soft, resigned voice, "The problem with noise is that it is very hard to manage. This is especially true with traditional religious festivals. It is just generally not a good idea to tell people that they cannot observe their holiday." Since 1983, Taiwan has had a centralized noise control system that measures environmental noise in terms of decibels. Residents submit noise complaints to local Environmental Protection Bureaus through post, e-mail, or telephone. Upon review, an environmental inspector typically responds by carrying out a noise inspection and measuring the offending sound with a decibel meter. Common sources of noise include the sounds of traffic, airplanes, railroads, construction sites, loudspeakers, and factories, as well as industrial machinery found in buildings and commercial establishments.

Some sounds, including the low-frequency rumbling of exhaust fans and air conditioners, are generally recognized as potential sources of environmental noise (*zaoyin*). Other sounds are ambiguous and raise questions about the correlation between scientific measurements of noise and the cultural expectations for the sounding of a place. In fact, Gary's statement at the start of this chapter alludes to a perennial challenge in Taiwan's noise management system. While some Taiwanese residents have voiced their concern about the sound of firecrackers and drumming at religious festivals, often late into the night, such sounds are not widely regarded as noise by the public. During our chat, Gary pulled up online videos of traditional religious festivals throughout Taiwan to show the widespread popularity of these events. We stared at the computer screen in awe at the sight of crowds gathering around *beiguan* and *nanguan* music,¹ and we gasped as devotees donning raincoats and helmets ran directly into exploding firecrackers at the Tainan Yanshui Beehive Fireworks Festival (鹽水蜂炮).²

As Gary explained, the variety of lively sounds at religious festivals, as well as the sheer physicality of the sounds, far exceeded the technocratic framing of noise as unwanted sound. To call such sounds noise seemed to belie the cultural and ethical value underlying festival sounds. And yet, environmental officials in noise control management expect a rise in the number of noise

complaints during religious holidays, such as the Dajia Mazu Pilgrimage (大甲媽祖繞境), that inadvertently positions Taiwan's environmental noise control system at the center of deliberations concerning the moral and cultural boundaries of noise.

Complicating matters further, Gary suggested the need for caution when interfering with otherworldly affairs. In contrast to official attitudes during the authoritarian era that regarded temple festivals as noisy and uncivilized, government authorities today believe that the idea of disrupting a temple festival "would be seen as an act hostile to the whole community" and would be considered a bad omen (Chen 2011, 110). Other inspectors held similar views, explaining that any attempt to enforce noise regulations during religious festivals would create public outcry. Their reluctance to manage festival sounds is supported by official policies under the Noise Control Act of 1983, established by the Ministry of Health,³ that grants traditional festivals an exemption from noise control regulations. Still, this has not stopped some unhappy neighbors from filing noise complaints, and noise control managers anticipate an increase in complaints whenever large festivals, like the Dajia Mazu Pilgrimage in Central Taiwan, occur. Unique to Taiwan's noise control system is the ongoing question of whether the sounds of traditional temple festivals, including fireworks, drumming, and amplified loudspeakers, cross the threshold from the cultural aesthetic of *renao*, or hot-noisy, into the regulated domain of *zaoyin*.

This chapter examines the concept of *renao* as it is made and re-made in the context of Taiwan's noise control system. As an anthropologist who studies noise and noise control regulations in Taiwan, I quickly learned after sixteenth months of fieldwork in Taipei from 2014 to 2015 that I could not understand the social and political legacy of environmental noise (*zaoyin*) without also investigating its historical relationship to *renao*. A ubiquitous feature of temple festivals, *renao* has been widely analyzed as a cultural aesthetic that speaks to the noisy and bustling qualities of a place.⁴ Within local religious traditions in Taiwan, *renao* constitutes the desirable cacophony of a crowd and indicates an unrestrained, elevated display of faith. While *renao* refers to an amalgamation of affective qualities, including the sights, sounds, and energy of a place (Hatfield 2010; Weller 1994), its sonic features are unambiguous: the louder, the better. Within the noise control system, however, sounds that surpass a certain decibel level are considered noise, meaning that the louder a sound gets, the more likely it qualifies as noise. The incongruity of *renao* in noise management speaks to an ontological gap between the two terms that produces different assumptions about "the ways people use and interpret" sounds and, in turn, "form judgments of ethical and political value" (Keane 2018, 67).

In this chapter, I depart from questions about whether the sounds of *renao* ought to be incorporated into Taiwan's noise control system and, instead, examine what it means for the concept of *renao* to exist in tension with the concept of *zaoyin*. How does *renao* complicate assumptions about noise and

noise control? How does the emergence of noise regulations in Taiwan reconfigure the public's relationship to the state, particularly around changing perceptions of *renao*? Following Gary's observation regarding the conceptual and ontological differences between *zaoyin* and *renao*, I analyze how Taiwan's noise control system produces a new framing for *renao* through which Taiwanese citizens re-evaluate their commitments as subjects of the state.

Based on developments in Western noise control engineering dating back to the early 1900s (Thompson 2004; Bijsterveld 2008; Schwartz 2011), Taiwan's noise control system operates within the logics of acoustical sciences and quantitative measurement that seem worlds apart from the intangible ritual exchange surrounding *renao*. Yet, the contrasting paradigms of *renao* and *zaoyin* are brought into relation with one another in the bureaucratic space of the noise control office that determines the state's authority to manage noise. In the following sections, I analyze studies of *renao* with respect to the literature on traditional temple festivals and their relationship to the state. I examine the historical transformations through which *renao* has been criticized, moralized, and protected as a cultural value. Drawing on interviews with government officials, Taipei city residents, as well as my own participant-observation during one leg of the Dajia Mazu Pilgrimage—an annual eight-day, 312-kilometer pilgrimage in Central Taiwan to honor the goddess Mazu, the patron saint of Taiwan—I discuss the different ways in which the discourse of *renao* is entangled with discussions of *zaoyin*. Through an ethnographic and historical analysis, this chapter expands an understanding of *renao* from a cultural, local aesthetic into an articulation of political commitments, one that continues to be negotiated in the sonic domain. Rather than fixed, discrete objects, *renao* and *zaoyin* operate in relation to one another as fluid concepts that are being reworked and reassessed through the auditory sensibilities of Taiwanese citizens.

Music, sound, and noise

Folk religion in Taiwan—an amalgamation of beliefs originating in Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and animism—has long formed the basis for scholarly investigations on the relationship between citizens and the state. Dating back to the eighteenth century, traditional temples were bulwarks of cultural and ethnic identity that resulted in government apprehension well into the twentieth century. The *Kōminka* Movement during Japanese colonial rule led to the destruction of traditional folk temples (Ching 2001), while Kuomintang (KMT) Nationalists in China launched an anti-traditionalist campaign against popular religion that continued in Taiwan after 1945 (Bosco 1994; Cohen 1991). In both instances, traditional temples signified subversive threats to state power, first as an expression of Han Chinese identity during the colonial era and later as an obstacle to social progress following the May Fourth Movement.

Government antagonism towards folk religion precipitated the formation of a “pan-Taiwanese or island-wide” identity (Chipman 2009, 56; Hsiao 2000; Sangren 1988). Taking advantage of the newly built railway system in colonial Taiwan, island-wide pilgrimages as early as 1911 raised funds for temples, including the famed Beigang Chaotian Gong (北港朝天宮) in Yunlin, Taiwan (Chipman 2009). Writing during the martial law period, Emily Martin and Hill Gates analyzed traditional festivals as a site of resistance and expression of local Taiwanese identity among Hokkiens and Hakka (Ahern 1981; Rohsenow 1973). Additionally, Myron Cohen notes how Taiwanese elites, who like the KMT were initially critical of popular religion, eventually coalesced around the practice as an assertion of Taiwanese identity in subtle protest against the state (Cohen 1991).

While studies have analyzed the political influence of traditional temple festivals through an analysis of social relations (Wu 2004; Sangren 1988), ethnic identity (Bosco 1994; Cohen 1991; Ahern 1981; Rohsenow 1973), religious practice (Camhi-Rayer 2014), political relations (Katz 2003), and cross-strait relations (Hsun 2012), less analytical focus has been given to the affective, material qualities at traditional temple festivals, such as the production of *renao*. The anthropologist DJ Hatfield has focused attention on the physical experience of festival participation, commenting on *renao* as a distinct quality in the formation of publics. Noting how *renao* “is always produced in, and emergent from, gatherings and dispersals of crowds” (Hatfield 2010, 25), Hatfield emphasizes the way temple festivals energize crowds to produce moments of collective effervescence. The aesthetic of *renao*, argues Hatfield, leads to the formation of crowds that is paramount to the creation of political power: “Vibrant, voluntary, and seemingly spontaneous ... noisy-hot crowds produce public images of the people without which democratic polities would appear incomplete” (Hatfield 2010, 45). More than a cultural and religious tradition, temple festivals hold political significance.

Though Hatfield is interested in the embodied acts of festival participation, his analysis of the affective qualities of *renao* also relates to the sonic qualities of *renao*, in particular the ubiquity of musical performances and fireworks during such moments of crowd-formation. Political philosopher Jacques Attali writes of the ritual power of music, explaining, “Music, the quintessential mass activity, like the crowd, is simultaneously a threat and a necessary source of legitimacy; trying to channel it is a risk that every system of power must run” (Attali 1985, 14). Understood in the context of political economy, *renao* represents a sound-making practice that subverts state power through its multi-faceted ability to produce order and harmony—in the creation of crowds—while disrupting established norms—in the production of carnivalesque spectacles. Described by Hill Gates as the “vibrations of the heavily-amplified music” and “the cheerful sounds of percussion accompaniment and fireworks” (Rohsenow 1973, 129, 123), *renao* signifies the possibilities for local, political power in ways that challenge state control.

Ethnomusicologist Chen Chiung-Chi further describes the phenomenon with regards to electronic festooned vehicles, *dianzi huache* (also known as electric flower cars), that are common spectacles at funerals and temple festivals. Chen writes that the combination of striptease performance and amplified music produces “shocking entertainment [and] demonstrates the political power of the temple festival sponsors” to commit brazen acts in the presence of local and state authorities (Chen 2011, 113).

While Attali’s work is useful in considering the transformative potential of music, the second part of Attali’s quotation notes the dual role of music as a threat and a “necessary source of legitimacy” for state power. Alongside the ability for *renao* to produce a mainly Hokkien- and Hakka-based pan-Taiwanese identity, the KMT beginning in the late 1960s shifted its attitude toward popular religion from an oppositional standpoint to an amicable one. In 1967, Chiang Ching-Kuo paid the first of many visits to the Mazu shrine at Beigang Chaotian Gong that initiated “the normalization of popular religious practices in Taiwan under democratic transition” (Hatfield 2010, 69). Through his continuous engagement with Chaotian Gong, Chiang legitimized popular religion, thereby cementing its importance as a vital resource for building political support (Bosco 1994; Katz 2003; Cohen 1991). By incorporating popular religion into government policies under the Cultural Council of Planning and Development (known as Council of Cultural Affairs after 1995), the KMT sought to “reduc[e] the opposition between Chinese-ness and Taiwanese-ness” (Bosco 1994, 397). In this way, folk religion fell within the scope of state-sanctioned activities.

Building on the potential for *renao* to produce political attachments, I explore how Taiwan’s noise control system comes into contact with culturally derived sentiments on *renao*. Attali’s treatise on the political power of music charts a connection between the political power of festival sounds, the transformative potential of music, and the inclination of the state to implement noise control. On the creation of noise control regulations in France, Attali writes, “Everywhere, power reduces the noise made by others and adds sound prevention to its arsenal. Listening becomes an essential means of surveillance and social control” (Attali 1985, 122). In the same way that Hatfield’s festivalgoers produce relations of belonging through navigating the affective field of *renao*, relations between citizens and the state are produced through discursive formulations that delineate the ethical and perceptual relationship between *renao* and *zaoyin*.

Thinking beyond binaries of *renao* and *lengqing* (coldness), the profane and the sacred, the ruled and the ruler, I examine how two parallel ideologies of noise, *renao* and *zaoyin*, relate to one another within the enactment of everyday life. How do questions of civility, cultural identity, and quality of life emerge within discourses of noise? An analysis of the sociocultural features of temple festivals, and of how individuals argue for either the inclusion or exclusion of temple festivals within Taiwan’s noise control regulation, offer new ways to rethink the role of temple festivals in producing identification

and community with others. By thinking about these two concepts alongside one another, I show how the phenomenon of traditional temple festivals is not a relic of the past, but a social practice that is continuously evolving and in dialog with other existing social institutions. Through negotiating the contradictions, ideological attachments, and material qualities of renao and zaoyin, citizens and the state engage in ongoing exchanges regarding the cultural meaning of noise.

Transmediating renao through zaoyin

Throughout the twentieth century, Japanese colonial settlers and KMT Chinese settlers to Taiwan documented what, to them, were the offensive sounds of renao emanating not only from temple festivals but also from street vendors and markets. According to the *Taiwan Daily Daily News* published in colonial Taiwan, the discourse of noise was one way to distinguish the colony from the metropole. In 1932, a Japanese student living in Taiwan described the street noise in the morning produced by tofu vendors.⁵ He wrote,

The tofu vendors start selling tofu from 5:30 to 7:30 in the morning. There are several sellers in the same district. They use bugles to let people know that they have arrived and walk around the residential area several times. The explosive quality of the noise disturbs us many times.

The writer describes matter-of-factly the source of noise and the frequency of the bugles that causes distress. He continues by explaining that the underlying problem is one of ethnicity: “The Taiwanese might enjoy the street noises,” he explains, “But we Japanese cannot stand the sounds of tofu vendors.” Also in the 1930s, local noise control regulations in cities like Hsinchu, Keelung, and Taipei regulated the volume of the radio and phonograph, as well as the use of car horns. Restrictions were placed on the setting of firecrackers, with authorities reminding the “people on the island” (*bendao ren*) that the firecrackers were startling to neighbors and disrupted the peace.⁶

Similar complaints about the noisiness of Taiwanese were published in the KMT-sponsored *United Daily News* (*Lianhebao*), such as a 1973 report on outdoor Taiwanese opera that ran late into the night during a birthday celebration for the deity Guan Gong. The writer questions the police’s implicit approval of the outdoor opera’s continuing uninterrupted, pointing out police officers’ complicity in allowing residents to be bombarded by zaoyin (*yong zaoyin lai qinxi women*). Throughout the 1970s, newspapers like the *United Daily News* listed the problem of festival noise alongside other noise problems, including vehicle noise and factory noise. Such efforts sought to resignify the sounds of traditional festivals to zaoyin.⁷

Formal debate over the status of festival sounds, and whether or not they counted as zaoyin, took place during legislative sessions on the Noise Control

Act of 1983. As part of Taiwan's efforts to modernize and become a liberalized state, the Executive Yuan's Ministry of Health sought to pass the Noise Control Act (*Zaoyin guanzhi fa*), which would create a blueprint for managing environmental noise using decibel meters and noise control standards. Intended as a way to improve the quality of life for citizens, legislators heralded the new regulations as an important addition to Taiwan's environmental policies, one that set out to listen to and respond to the needs of the people.

While some continued to call for the sounds of temple festivals to be prohibited under the newly implemented Noise Control Act of 1983, lawmakers at the Legislative Yuan raised the question about whether or not traditional festivals ought to be subject to noise regulations. Xu Ziqiu, the Minister at the Ministry of Health, which housed the Department of Environmental Protection at the time, testified at the legislative hearings in 1982,

For folk customs, celebrations, and other forms of entertainment, such as worship (*baibai*), and Taiwanese Opera (*gezaixi*) that may attract zaoyin, the government will avoid prohibiting these activities as they are only temporary and, therefore, will not cause harm to one's health. We will only prohibit those sounds that actually present a public harm.

(Lifa yuan 1982, 144).

Legislator Liu Zhanzhou was more explicit about his reasoning *not* to include temple festivals in the Noise Control Act. During a committee hearing, Liu explained, "Of course vehicles, factories, airplanes produce what we call noise, but are temple festival sounds considered noise? If you prohibit these sounds, you will probably go against the people" (Lifa yuan 1983, 119). In the context of a liberalizing state, the question of whether the sounds of renao were to be incorporated into the discourse of zaoyin produced a unique set of problematics for Taiwan's implementation of noise control.

Moreover, it was through the recognition of renao as a cultural value that Hokkiens and Hakka also emerged as political subjects. In a statement that showed the gradual opening of political participation by Hokkiens and Hakka, Zhuang Jing-Yuan, the Japanese-trained director of the Department of Environmental Protection, testified in 1983, "Of course, our people are a very lively people that love renao, and so our noise control standards are going to be more accommodating than those in other countries" (Lifa yuan 1983, 122–23). Moving away from the oppositional mentality that separated the émigré legislators from locals, Zhuang invoked local Taiwanese not as subjects to be managed, but as citizens of the state.

While the sounds of fireworks, drumming, and renao were disparaged by colonial officials and Chinese settlers in the early half of the twentieth century, state officials grew to accept, and even protect, the continued expression of renao during the democratic transition in the 1980s. By analyzing discussions of fireworks, drumming, and renao within the context of noise regulations, it is further possible to understand how the social and political legacy

of traditional temple festivals extends beyond the space of local religious practice and into the secular spaces of government.

Noisy co-existence

One day, I was having a conversation with a telephone dispatcher at the environmental protection office in Taipei. Ms. Lee, a soft-spoken Hokkien woman in her sixties, had worked for decades answering phone calls directed to the environmental complaint hotline. Whenever residents called to report a noise problem, she collected information about the location of the noise problem, asked questions to identify the type of noise, and transferred the call to the designated inspection team so that they could conduct an on-site inspection. During our conversation, I asked whether people called to complain about temple festivals. She demurred in her response, “Yes, we have people who complain about temple festivals. They’re considered a noise problem for some people.” To my surprise, she changed the subject, “But, so are loud-speaker systems, and garbage trucks.” She continued, “You know how the garbage truck plays music? Some people think it is really loud and hard to listen to, but then others will say that they need it to be loud enough to hear it. So you have those cases as well, where people disagree.” Ms. Lee quickly shifted attention away from temple festivals and to other related sources of noise. Within the Noise Control Act, the sounds of temple festivals existed in close proximity to the sounds of garbage trucks and loudspeaker systems.

The exchange is worth analyzing in the context of the state’s historical attitude toward temple festivals. It is possible that the way I phrased the question was too direct, prompting Ms. Lee to hurry and change the subject. In any case, Ms. Lee seemed to make clear that temple festivals, while not the primary target of noise regulations, were nevertheless unwitting casualties of noise control. Instead of politicizing the state’s regulatory approach to temple festivals, Ms. Lee positioned festivals within the conceptual space of other noise-making phenomena in a manner that flattened the sounds from their cultural and moral significance into the material object of sound. She attempted to draw attention away from the significance and meaning of temple festivals and refocus attention on the physicality of the sound itself and its connection to existing noise regulations.

The ontological flattening of festival sounds into a physical sound occurs in official government publications, as well. The *Noise Control Chronology* (噪音管制紀實), published by the Taiwan EPA in 2012 to commemorate thirty years of the Noise Control Act, mentions temple festivals as one of many possible sources of noise alongside the sounds of construction, in particular pile-driving. Echoing the sentiments made by former Director of Environmental Protection Zhuang Jing-Yuan, the report mentions:

Our countrymen like *renao*. Not only can you hear the sound of fireworks, but also lion dances, drumming sounds, and electric flower cars

during New Year's holidays, weddings and funerals, and deities' birthdays. These are extraordinarily *renao* activities that can cause disruption for some people. Also, many construction projects have pile-driving, sometimes two or three machines working at the same time. These machines create construction noise and affect people's tranquility.

(Xingzheng 2012, 3)

Through the discourse of *zaoyin*, which is based on the use of decibel measurements and quantitative standards to determine a noise violation, the Noise Control Act incorporates different historical and cultural forms of sounding into the language of noise control engineering. Implicit in these narratives is that, contrary to the efforts of previous regimes, the state is evaluating temple festivals on the basis only of noise, rather than religious belief.

These efforts reflect a delicate balancing act between letting people make noise, on the one hand, and restricting noise, on the other. From the position of the Noise Control Act, restrictions around the sounds from traditional festivals are relegated to local governments, who have the authority to set curfews and limits on noise during festivals. Although they have this authority, most local governments typically make an exemption for traditional festivals, meaning there are no curfews for fireworks or processions during designated holidays, such as New Years, Lantern Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Ghost Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, National Day, and other traditional holidays.

While the government attempts to create a separation between *renao* and *zaoyin* by managing *zaoyin* while allowing *renao* to co-exist, some residents, such as the callers to Ms. Lee's environmental hotline, continue to rally for additional restrictions. Writing in the 1970s, Gates mentions that those who held negative views of traditional festivals tended to be mainlanders from China or upwardly mobile Hokkien residents. This may still be the case, but it is difficult to verify. Nevertheless, noise complaints about festival *renao* show the ongoing negotiations between the categories of *zaoyin* and *renao*. Take, for instance, this translation of a noise complaint that was reported during the Dajia Mazu Pilgrimage in Central Taiwan:

Dajia Mazu gets worse and worse each year.
Before it would go till 1 or 2 AM,
This year it unexpectedly went till dawn at 4 AM!!!
Fireworks continued to go on for another half hour!!!
What is going on? Don't these people have to work?
Can normal people not get a good night's sleep?
It's almost 4 in the morning!!!
Please,
Can you not work on this?
I'm not asking for anything elaborate.

Can't you just control it a little more?

Or at least go coordinate and talk to them some more?

The writer asks rhetorical questions that aim to rationalize the writer's worldview, where the all-night festivities disturb those who have to report to work in the morning. Instead of demanding government attention, the writer tests the boundary between *zaoyin* and *renao*, insisting on more overlap between the two. In addition, the writer seems aware of the political sensitivity around complaining about festivals when offering the opinion that, while the sound of fireworks until 2 AM is tolerable, 4 AM is not. It is important to note, however, that even if the writer of this particular noise complaint believed that 2 AM was an acceptable time to set off fireworks, there may be others who believe that 2 AM is not acceptable. In other words, the numerous possibilities for justifying a noise complaint mean that the line between *renao* and *zaoyin* is subject to individual preference. Through complaints about the noise of temple festivals, residents navigate the cultural value of temple festivals, quality of life questions such as getting a good night's sleep, and the physical impact of the sounds themselves.

In addition to managing the expectations of *zaoyin* and *renao* among residents, the noise control system negotiates the two values between local and state governments. I had traveled to Central Taiwan with representatives from the environmental protection office in Taipei to attend the Dajia Mazu Pilgrimage Festival. The representatives were part of the waste and disposal unit, and they had provided funding to the local government to promote recycling and waste reduction at the festival. We were there to watch and support the volunteer clean-up crews at the pilgrimage, who trailed closely behind the festival procession, sweeping away remnants of firecrackers in a uniformed, choreographed manner as soon as the ashes hit the ground.

Local officials were proud to showcase their recycling and waste efforts, and they received the government representatives with warmth and hospitality. When one of the representatives with whom I was traveling informed the local officials that I was a scholar conducting research on noise, however, their tone changed just slightly. My presence, and my own scholarly interest in noise, overstepped an unspoken boundary between noise control and *renao*. While standing by the clean-up crews, waiting for them to begin their routine, I tried to strike up a conversation with a local staffmember and asked whether they ever received complaints about noise. He responded reluctantly, "Yeah, we get noise complaints, but not during this time (*dan zhege shihou bu hui*)."

He looked down at his shoes, made a small kick, and moved ever so slightly so that eventually his back was turned towards me. Realizing that my questions did not have an audience, I decided to stop being an anthropologist for the night and attempted to chase after Mazu's palanquin, joining the collective *renao*. In the midst of the festivities, *zaoyin* did not exist. If I had set out in search of *zaoyin*, I was not going to find it at temple festivals.

When noise becomes protected

I did find others who were willing to talk to me about noise. During a community tour of the Wanhua neighborhood around Longshan Temple in Taipei, I started a conversation with two women who took interest in my research. We set up a time to meet at a bustling restaurant inside a shopping mall in the Xinyi District, the financial and cosmopolitan area of Taipei. As part of what Steven Feld and Donnalda Brenneis call “doing anthropology in sound” (Feld and Brenneis 2004), I spoke with them to learn about their perceptions of noise in Taipei.

Sitting down at a booth in a bustling, brightly lit Japanese restaurant, one of the women, whom I will call Lisa, instructively said to me, “It’s really loud in this restaurant, but we’re used to it.” In the background, servers yelled out orders to the kitchen staff, while the hostess called out greetings to customers. I heard babies screaming in the background, adding to an energetic, lively atmosphere that could be considered *renao*. Lisa continued, “My brother lives in the U.S., and I would never take him to this restaurant. He would say, ‘What are you doing eating at a noisy place like this!’” In explaining the difference between loudness and noise, Lisa said something that many residents in Taiwan had said to me already: “It might be loud and noisy, but we don’t see it as a problem.” Like other residents, Lisa was expanding the conceptual space of noise, taking back some of the assumptions of noise in the context of noise control engineering and showing how noise was not always unwanted sound.

In regards to festival sounds, Lisa and her colleague Annie made a similar analysis. While the sounds of firecrackers and amplified music were noisy, it was not something that they would consider *zaoyin*. Annie explained,

These [temple sounds] are very natural, very normal. As a kid, I would go with my parents, and we’d see the firecrackers that were right in front of us, not even thinking about how dangerous it was. I’d cover my ears with my hands. Even if I thought that the noise was really scary, I wouldn’t say anything about it. You just accept it as it is.

In listening to their explanations about *renao*, I came to understand the two concepts, *renao* and *zaoyin*, as different ideologies about noise that produced their own set of social relations and structures. Trying to describe one in relation to the other was one way to articulate the relational nature of both terms. While *zaoyin* was purported to be sounds that could be detected using decibel meters and quantitative measurements, the noise control system’s method of determining noise was as situated and contextual as *renao*. Taiwan, and the tradition of temple festivals, is a site where ideologies of noise, in terms of a language ideology (Woolard 1998; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994), come into contact with one another.

I pushed forward with my naïve questions and asked my interlocutors whether they would ever complain about temple festival noise. Both were firm in explaining that they would not. Like the environmental inspectors who had balked at the idea of regulating festival *renao*, Lisa explained, “Even if the authorities wanted to do something about it, they would not be able to gain any traction on the issue (管不動 *guan budong*).” They explained that the festivals had attained the status of culture, and that the Taiwanese government had started to promote them as tourist attractions. With the elevation of festivals from local superstitions to national culture, there became even less of an incentive to report festival *renao* as *zaoyin*. Annie explained,

When these events started off, only a few locals observed the holiday. But with cultural heritage, the festivals have become a point of pride that needs to be passed down to the next generation. No one wants to go against something that’s established as a cultural value, as something that represents Taiwan.

Not only a cultural practice, temple festivals have become a source of national pride, and the number of pilgrimages and festivalgoers has grown in the twenty-first century. In his ethnography, Hatfield explains how the cultural transformation has come at the cost of disrupting local traditions, wherein the state absorbs the local rituals and transforms them into an instrumental expression of a so-called national culture. In the context of Taiwan’s noise control system, however, the enculturation of temple festivals in Taiwan serves as a holdout against the complete absorption of sounding practices against the ideology of *zaoyin*. In the context of *renao*, noise control functions as only one of the ways in which people engage with the sonic environment. The productive tension between *renao* and *zaoyin* assures that neither concept is completely absorbed into the other and is a reminder that multiple ideologies of noise co-exist.

Conclusion

The debates surrounding *renao* and *zaoyin* are representative of the political and cultural transformations in Taiwan from the colonial era in the early twentieth century to the present.

This chapter has examined how the sounding practices at traditional temple festivals simultaneously are qualities of *renao* that become re-signified through the concept of *zaoyin*. Analyzing the tension between *renao* and *zaoyin* enables the two concepts to be understood as categories of sound that are co-constructed, rather than naturalized categories. In this way, it would be a mistake to assume that *renao* is an endemically Taiwanese concept while *zaoyin* is a Western one. Nor is it the case that *renao* is more traditional while *zaoyin* is more modern. Instead, the two concepts circulate in relation to one another in ways that have defined and developed the concepts well

into the twenty-first century. As a place in which sounding practices and the varied acts of hearing are negotiated continuously with one another, Taiwan offers an opportunity to rethink the embodied and conceptual boundaries of political participation.

Notes

- 1 For more on musical practices of Taiwan, see Ying-fen Wang on *nanguan* (Y.-F. Wang 2003; 2001; 1992), Lee Ching-huei on *beiguan* (Lee 2012), Nancy Guy on Peking Opera (Guy 2005; 1999), and Teri Silvio on Taiwanese Opera (Silvio 2019).
- 2 Held annually in Tainan, Taiwan on the 15th day of the Lunar New Year, the Yanshui Beehive Fireworks Festival is a traditional festival held in honor of the Daoist God Guan Gong. Attendees build rocket towers that resemble the shape of a beehive. These fireworks are ignited into crowds as a gesture of prosperity for the coming year.
- 3 The Noise Control Act was passed in 1983 by the Legislative Yuan and established by the Department of Environmental Protection under the Ministry of Health of the Executive Yuan. In 1987, the Department of Environmental Protection split from the Ministry of Health and became a cabinet-level institution, currently known as the Taiwan Environmental Protection Administration (*huanjing baohu shu*). Local offices of the Taiwan EPA, *huanbao ju*, are typically translated as Environmental Protection Bureau or Department of Environmental Protection. See <https://www.epa.gov.tw/eng/DB6E2C29814EB83A>, accessed 6 October 2020.
- 4 The concept of *renao* has analogs in other languages, such as *ramé* in Indonesian (Novak 2015).
- 5 A Student. 1932. “Kōkai ran 惱 masareru asa no 噪音” 公開欄 悩まされる朝の噪音 [Public bulletin: increasingly irritable morning noise], *Taiwan nichi nichi sinpo* 台灣日日新報 [Taiwan Daily Daily News], Japanese-language edition, 10 December, 3.
- 6 Anonymous. 1937. “Bendao ren fang baozhu xuzhi” 本島人放爆竹須知 [Notice on setting firecrackers for people on the island], *Taiwan ri ri xinbao* 台灣日日新報 [Taiwan Daily Daily News], Chinese-language edition, 25 February, 8.
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