We are a funny duo in Taiwan. One of us is a 1.5-generation Taiwanese American; the other is a white New Englander, both living in the American South. In Taiwan, we straddle the three-part identity of tourist, researcher, and performer.

Last year we went to Taiwan for a mini-tour playing in three major cities as two thirds of experimental music trio Pinko Communoids. This year, we returned mostly in the name of “research.” But in reality, theory and practice go hand in hand. We revisited the tracks that we trekked, reconnecting with the friends we made last year. Because of the short length of our stay, we comfortably think of ourselves as tourists with a “research eye.”

In one month, we immersed ourselves in the independent (indie) music scene in Taipei, going to concerts, talking with musicians and music enthusiasts, and collecting media about indie music in Taiwan. In our preliminary research in Taiwan, we set out to experience Taiwanese indie music with no particular “comparative” agenda relative to our research in US-based indie music-culture. Nevertheless, our intellectual lens brought us to pay special attention to the interaction between the local and the global, noticing trends of transnationality in the production of local identities.

The island of Taiwan has a complex history of transnational crossings. The Dutch and Portuguese occupied Taiwan in the 17th century until the Chinese took the island and ruled it for three centuries. Continually pushed from their land, Native Taiwanese were disenfranchised during these and later occupations. In 1895, China ceded Taiwan to Japan, resulting a 50-year occupation that ended when Japan lost WWII. When the Communist Party took Mainland China in 1949, the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) opposition fled to Taiwan. Aided by the United States throughout the Cold War, KMT military leader Chiang Kai-Shek governed the island under martial law. However, by 1978, the United States and the United Nations sought to rebuild relations with China and no longer recognized Taiwan as a sovereign nation. In the late 1980s, Taiwan formed a two-party
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democracy, split between reconciliation with China and Taiwanese independence. Since then, polarizing issues regarding a “Taiwanese” identity shape the island’s cultural and political landscapes.

Our notes below are oriented toward our individual research perspectives and projects. With a focus on music and culture, Wendy describes the cultural production of “Taiwanese” sound and identity by Freddy Lim, his metal band and involvement in public cultural affairs. From a sociological perspective, Carey delves into the history and current position of the western expatriates within the indie music scene in Taiwan.

Freddy Lim’s Branding of “Taiwanese” Sound and Identity
Wendy Hsu

Known as “Freddy” (in English) in Taiwanese media, Freddy Lim spearheads the independent music scene in Taiwan. His role in the cultural landscape of Taiwan and in the world extends far beyond music. I find the cultural industry led by Freddy to be a fascinating case of how indie music organizes transnational social movement.

I secured a spot in Freddy’s busy schedule with his agent using our mutual connection to a musician from New Jersey. At The Wall, one of the most established “Live Houses” in Taipei, we sat down near the entrance of the White Wabbit indie music record store and began chatting about Taiwanese music and cultural industry. With his long hair tied back in a ponytail, wearing a T-shirt and jeans, Freddy seems amicable and earnest in person, quite contrary to his dark, intense stage persona in his metal band ChthoniC.

“THE LOCAL IDEA”

Freddy leads ChthoniC, an internationally recognized “extreme metal band.” In a typical ChthoniC song, one hears symphonic synthesizer, machine-gun guitar riffs, rapid firing on drums and bass, screaming vocals, and a crying erhu, a traditional Chinese two-string bowed instrument. The band utilizes song form, length, modes,

1 A live house is essentially a live music venue. It is an alternative to bars or pubs where only recorded music is played. Live houses have been central in the building of an underground live music scene in Taipei and other major cities in Taiwan. It is often where musicians meet one another and form social networks.
instrumentation, and the generally dark imagery from metal, while fusing these now universal pop music elements with a “local flavor.” The erhu accents the melody with its melancholic, “mysterious” sound. Also, ChthoniC’s songs reference Taiwanese mythology and history. This “local idea,” according to Freddy, is ChthoniC’s winning ticket particularly in the international pop music arena. Freddy explained, “The basic structure of metal is not going to change. Even if you use modern instruments and songwriting techniques, for example, 3-to-7-minute song length and verse-chorus-verse structure, you still need an idea. The bottom line is the idea. An idea is a way for others to enter your story. This is especially the case for metal since concept is important in this genre.”

**POLITICIZING MUSIC/MUSIC-POLITICKING**

“ChthoniC” means “gods of the underworld” in Greek and has implications for the cultural and political underground. The band uncovers and reinterprets hidden stories of Taiwan’s past through their concept albums. For instance, Seediq Bale (2005/6) is based on the story of the Native Taiwanese group Seediq’s revolt against Japanese colonialists, which resulted in a massacre of the Native Taiwanese population. The award-winning album Relentless Recurrence (2002/6) adapts the story of Na Tao Ji [林投姊], a ghost folk tale that depicts the life of a woman who commits suicide to return as a ghost to take revenge on a Chinese man who has raided her wealth and sexuality and returned to China. This story, according to Freddy, reflects the fate of many Taiwanese women during influx of Han Chinese immigrants to Taiwan in the 17th century.

Freddy cites ChthoniC’s main influence as being black metal. Originating in Northern European countries such as Norway, the black metal movement uses pagan, Satanist, and other anti-christ imagery as a nativist effort to counter the hegemony of Christianity. Similarly, ChthoniC adapts black metal’s dark aesthetics and nationalist aim for the Taiwanese context. Freddy sings and writes lyrics in the Taiwanese dialect. This has political significance. From 1949 until the late 1980s, Kuomintang (KMT) barred the use of Taiwanese in schools and media and instituted Mandarin as the official language. Since the 1990s, the use of Taiwanese over Mandarin has become a politicized symbol of the localization movement known as “Taiwanization” and is associated with Taiwanese independence.

Besides ChthoniC, Freddy fiercely creates and participates in public events. Most recently, a song he wrote for the Taiwanese baseball team was used to support the 2008 campaign of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate. Freddy also works closely as the Chief Operating Officer of TRA Music (The Running Ants Music, 螞蟻暴走音樂事業團隊) whose mission is to “develop a grounded environment for Taiwanese music while connecting with industry in Japan, Europe, and North America through concert events, festivals, and recordings that showcase Taiwanese and international artists.” Many TRA events reflect the organization’s political leaning toward Taiwanese nationalism. The most politically explicit perhaps is *Spirit of Taiwan*, formerly known as *Say Yes to Taiwan*. In 2000, the first of this festival series propagated messages of opposition to Chinese reunification. Each year the concert takes place on February 28 to commemorate the 228 Incident, symbolic of the violent military regime of the KMT in mid 20th century.

**REPRESENTING TAIWAN TO THE WORLD**

Freddy has become a self-designated spokesperson for Taiwanese independence internationally. Invited to perform at Ozzfest in the US and Wacken Open Air in Germany, ChthoniC toured US, Canada, and Europe, performing nearly 90 shows in 2007. The band named their tour as “UNlimited Taiwan”, a gesture to protest the UN’s
exclusion of Taiwan (as Republic of China) as an independent nation since 1971.

At the press conference in New York, organized by the Taiwanese American Association, Freddy made a speech addressed to the U.S. government and citizens protesting the UN’s recent rejection of Taiwan’s membership petition. Freddy asserted the United States is a symbol of freedom and democracy. He also criticized John Negroponte, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, for the latter’s comment that Taiwan’s push for UN membership is a ‘mistake.’ Freddy ended by appealing for U.S. support in recognizing Taiwan as a state of autonomous sovereignty apart from China. “I still have faith in your Country. Please support a democratic Taiwan and let the Taiwanese citizens share the same rights as your citizens in the international community. Don’t let us down.”

ChthoniC’s message of pro-Taiwan independence has drifted far and wide. At shows, Freddy rallied the crowd into screaming “Fuck China.” Taiwanese living abroad and fans from all over the world have expressed sympathy and support for the cause.

**Selling the Brand of Nationalism to the World**

Freddy’s feats have set deep roots in the indie music scene in Taiwan. Since the 1990s, Freddy and TRA Music have worked consciously to develop an ecology that encourages structural growth in the indie music scene domestically while increasing the contact between Taiwanese and international musicians. This is only one side of the story. Not all Taiwanese bands and citizens are pro-independence or DPP supporters. Backlash to Freddy and TRA-dominated industry has rippled, however, not in any organized effort. Most criticisms target him for politicizing music, dominating the scene, and using the industry to advance his own career. With persistence, Freddy’s personal political conviction continues to drive him in building a particular anti-reunification “local” identity and community, branding it as “Taiwanese” or “Asian” to the world.

The 2008 presidential election resulted in a political switchover from the DPP to the KMT. This has already prevented Freddy from wielding financial and political backing from the government to invest in cultural Taiwanization. Given this situation, I asked Freddy, “what next?” He expressed that the TRA-affiliates will undergo some organizational changes and concentrate on the business aspects of their work. For ChthoniC, this means orienting themselves further outward into the global scene. The band is now working on a new album, produced by Rob Caggiano, the guitarist of Anthrax. Similar to the Seediq Bale (2005/6), there will be a Taiwanese as well as an English release distributed worldwide.

Much of Freddy’s inspiration has derived from his experiences with and imagination of the U.S. and Europe: ideals of freedom and democracy filtered through the Euro-American rock idiom, now practiced

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7 ChthoniC, 這就是GUTS！——夢想這回事，從來沒有句點！ (Taipei: Eurasian Press, 2008), 104-5.

8 Recently, Taiwanese bands such as Varo have withdrawn from Formoz music festivals as a protest against Freddy and TRA Music. http://pots.tw/node/1009
in Taiwan vis a vis the world. As ChthoniC gains global recognition and mobility through record distribution and performances, I wonder, what will become of “Taiwanese” identity and sound domestically and internationally? Further, how do Freddy and ChthoniC manage or challenge the First-World or Euro-American notions of “Asia” or “Asian music”?

Expatriates and Taiwanese Indie Music
Carey Sargent

At Nanhai gallery, where Wendy and I performed on this trip to Taiwan, our collaboration with Nigel Brown from Twelve Dog Cycle, was billed as “Little Rain, from Australia/Taiwan/USA.” The complexity of our national ties and migrations is simplified by our billing, which is based on where each of us was born. Our billing also expressed an implicit, yet more salient, distinction—that Nigel and I are Waigoren，外國人.

Waigoren literally means foreigner, but it connotes white westerners who are English-speaking, even if English is not their native language. Waigoren are seen as outsiders no matter how long they may have lived in Taiwan. At the same time, Waigoren are assigned significant cultural and social capital, particularly within the independent music scene. The status of Waigoren is not simply a result of fetishism for the West and its musical culture. Their status has more to do with the cultural politics of Taiwan and their real life encounters and collaborations with Taiwanese in the music scene as musicians and music entrepreneurs seek to establish a uniquely Taiwanese indie scene.

The involvement of Waigoren in the music scene is often traced back to the influence of American GIs stationed on Taiwan in the 1950s and 60s. GIs brought their music with them, creating a consumer base for rock-n-roll juke joints and establishing a radio station (AAFR/ICRT) that broadcasted American music. While some of these GIs remained as expatriates, recent expatriates have formed ties with Taiwan as students and teachers of English. These students have been even more actively involved than their military predecessors in the organization, performance and consumption of local music. Since the 1980s, Waigoren formed bands, DJ’ed rock music in clubs, pushed for “live houses,” organized music festivals and brought Taiwanese bands abroad. In the three vignettes that follow, I show the involvement of Waigoren in the development of venues, the creation of a Taiwanese indie

10 Ibid.
sound, and Waigoren as both objects and agents in the consumption of Taiwanese local culture.

**Waigoren Building and Broadcasting the Scene**

Next to Shida nightmarket is the infamous live house the Underworld [地下社會]. The Underworld is literally underground, down a winding staircase with a colorful chalkboard marquee. On the night we attended a show there, that marquee listed Sonic Deadhorse, Dirt Star, and White Eyes performing for $100 NT (about $3 USD) for anyone over the age of 18. The venue has colorful paintings of amoeba-like aliens and monsters on the walls. The space was extremely cramped and the smoke there made tears run from my eyes. Waigoren took up the back of the club - some Americans, some Brits, some Aussies, nearly all of whom clasped a can of Taiwan Beer, a light, sweet local brew. To my initial surprise, the Waigoren kept entirely to themselves, mixing little with Taiwanese locals. Suyuan, a Taiwanese rock guitarist, was our companion that evening and she told me that Waigoren were there to listen to Dirt Star, a Waigoren band.

Dirt Star is a solo project with occasional collaborators. The solo-leader of the project hails from Canada but currently lives in China. With massive brown curls sprouting from his head, he sings, writes the songs, programs the drum beats into his laptop and plays his self-built guitar—a black acoustic guitar covered in cellophane and silver Christmas tree tinsel. At Underworld, Dirt Star’s collaborator played electric guitar in a button down shirt and red baseball cap, hanging in the back, sometimes doubling the Dirt Star’s guitar part and other times adding the “dirt,” or distortion. The set was comprised of clever, eccentric pop songs, largely sung in English.11 Between songs, the Dirt Star spoke to the crowd exclusively in Chinese, and I gather from Suyuan that his Chinese was very good.

Dirt Star and his collaborator at Underworld are ex-pats who began their time in Taiwan as students at the nearby NTNU (National Taiwan Normal University). A number of years ago, both members were involved in making the Underworld an indie music hub in Taipei. Dirt Star played at the first show and was involved in turning the club into a live house, while his collaborator painted the interior and has been a rock DJ there for years.

The headliner that night at Underworld was Taipei-based White Eyes, a post-punk band with a female lead singer.12 When they took the stage, the Waigoren crowd jumped to attention, pushing toward the stage. Each time the guitarist hit his whammy pedal white fists flew into the air. I overheard one Waigoren man say to another—“this has got to be my favorite band!” Waigoren are a part of the Underworld as organizers, musicians and fans. As fans, they work to spread knowledge of Taiwanese indie bands back home through social networking websites and blogs.13

**Waigoren Becoming Taiwanese Indie**

Witch House [女巫店] is a female-centric café underneath a lesbian feminist bookshop near NTU (National Taiwan University). On the night we attended, the café featured a well-known island and Native music band Passiwali, lead by Chalaw.14 The four men in the band alternated between acoustic guitar and d’jembe hand drums, occupying a space on the floor next to the bar in a well-lit, but cozy room. Two members of the project are Native Taiwanese and two are Waigoren. The audience that night was about half Waigoren and half Taiwanese.

Chalaw, the leader of the project, clearly directed the band that evening, speaking warmly with the audience and showcasing his well-trained, emotive voice and acoustic guitar picking. One of the Waigoren performers wowed the audience by singing in a Native Taiwanese dialect, proving his immersion in Taiwanese songs. Only toward the end of the set were the national identities of the Waigoren performers unveiled and it was done through song. The man who performed the Native Taiwanese song got on guitar a second time to play an Afro-pop song, revealing that he hails from South Africa, while the other man who had not sung all night, took the spotlight for a Spanish folk song.

Passiwali has released a CD with Taiwan Colors Music, the largest and oldest indie label in Taiwan.15 This label releases particular local

11 To listen to Dirt Star, visit http://www.myspace.com/dirtstar00. 12 To listen to White Eyes, visit http://www.myspace.com/whiteeyeslovesyou. 13 The most extensive of such sites is run by Marty Shane, an expatriate from New Jersey, USA who documented the Taiwanese scene for two years before moving to Japan. His website Island of Sound, can be found at http://www.islandofsound.org. 14 To listen to Passiwali and Chalaw’s music, visit: http://www.tcmusic.com or http://www.chalaw.blogspot.com. 15 This label was founded in 1999 by 43 Zhang, who had worked at a major label and in underground radio prior to establishing TCM.
indie rock bands, as well as compilations of Waigoren music, Aboriginal music, and talk shows filled with “ribald humor that strikes a populist chord” and the “rants of a Kaoshung motor bike mechanic.” This record label is Taiwanese-owned and its mission is to showcase the cultural diversity of the island and document the contemporary music scene. They seek to establish an “indigenous color, so that [the] product will have something distinctive that appeals to foreigners” as a way to reach a global market. The record label not only promotes Taiwanese indie music through CD production, distribution and promotion, but also by organizing socially themed festivals with support from the government. Through musical collaborations and indie industry publicity, Waigoren have become another ‘color’ in the local music scene.

**WAIGOREN BECOMING A ‘LOCAL FLAVOR’**

Taichung, a major city in the middle of Taiwan, has the second largest population of Waigoren next to Taipei. The culture and capital of Waigoren is important to the overall image of the city. The center of town hosts a foreigner district, where residents and tourists can sample European wine, coffee and pasta as well as dine at Western-Asian fusion restaurants. Taichung’s economic redevelopment plans focus on service and culture industries, making this district a key resource and Waigoren an important consumer base for the growth of the city.

The Mayor of Taichung, Jason Hu, has built his administration on developing Taichung as the cultural capital of Taiwan. Mayor Hu, educated in Britain, is the former director for the Taiwan Economic and Cultural Office in the US—the closest the US has to a Taiwanese embassy. His economic development model, like many US cities, is built on Richard Florida’s writing, the *Rise of the Creative Class*. Florida’s thesis is that small cities can become global cities by developing local-brands that market desirable lifestyles to creative, young professionals. These professionals create a critical mass of talent that draws technology and knowledge industries to small cities. As a post-industrial city, bypassed by the modern highway system, Taichung has much of its productive labor outsourced to China. Given this situation, Mayor Hu’s office has built on the existing service and consumer economy of the city, emphasizing the development of arts, culture and leisure as a way to court young educated Taiwanese from Taipei as well as foreign talent. Already the Mayor has courted the Guggenheim and made an effort to become a satellite city for Taipei’s National Palace Museum, giving him national and international recognition for his efforts. Since Hu’s election, the city has supported the construction of a baseball stadium and an outdoor city amphitheatre that hosts the symphony, jazz and theater.

These cultural projects, similar to those in small US cities, are built around a generalized idea about the authenticity of an organic indie music scene that percolates below the surface. However, according to Nigel, who moved to Taichung this year, there are few places to perform avant-garde music and the indie scene feels dominated by older Waigoren rock musicians playing to Waigoren audiences. The dissonance between his experience and positive press about the cultural scene of Taichung opens up interesting questions. To what extent does the development of institutional culture aid or dull the indie music scene? Might the city’s marketing of Waigoren culture ossify the indie scene as an exotic, ethnically defined activity?

**WHERE THESE STORIES LEAD**

Waigoren have been involved as performers, organizers, and curators of Taiwanese indie music and from their experiences have been adopted as a “local color” by the Taiwanese indie music industry. Waigoren’s cultural, human, and financial capital is not only of interest to those in the music scene, but also is promoted and courted by economic development projects based on cultural industry. In future research, I’d like to understand more about Taiwanese perspectives on the presence and culture of and to examine the role of Waigoren in Taiwanese efforts to construct a local identity within a global marketplace. More generally, I am interested in the significance of race and nationality in an interconnected postcolonial world, as people express local culture to global audiences.
As ethnographers, we’re not just interested in the global, or the local, but the intricate point of intersection between the two. Our experiences with Taiwanese indie music taught us much. A bold interpreter of Euro-American and Taiwanese music, Freddy Lim orients the Taiwanese as a “local flavor” of the East to a global audience. Waigoren musicians use their social and cultural capital to make a place for themselves in the music scene, and then their difference is consumed as a “local color” in Taiwanese music. These two contrasting examples shed light on the complex issues of transnational sociality and cultural globalization in postcolonial Taiwan.

Now that we are back in Virginia, our interconnections with Taiwan continue to develop over the Internet. Wendy is following the Taiwanese indie music scene through chats, emails, and blogs. She also anticipates following ChthoniC’s North American tour next January. Carey is making contact with English-speaking expatriates in Taiwan through email and social networking websites and discovering a wealth of information about culture and society in English-language Taiwanese magazines on-line. She is also working on her Chinese speaking and reading ability. While we listen to the recordings brought back from Taiwan, we conspire our next trip back to the island.

Media personality Bill O’Reilly started his career as a news reporter for local television stations in Dallas, Boston, and New York. He anchored the syndicated daytime news program Inside Edition beginning in 1995, and the following year, acquired his own television opinion program on the newly-minted FoxNews cable network. Shortly after its debut, his show, The O’Reilly Factor, jumped to the top of the ratings where it has remained virtually unchallenged ever since.

O’Reilly has become famous for his polemical rants and aggressive interviewing style. He is equally famous for his clan of roving “shock and awe” reporters, sent to ambush unsuspecting interviewees with a barrage of explosive questions. However, his abrasive reputation has not worn away his public image or popularity. In the past decade, O’Reilly has published numerous books, many of which made, if not topped, The New York Times “Best Sellers” list.

Now that O’Reilly has released his eighth book—the almost scandalously-titled autobiography A Bold Fresh Piece of Humanity, O’Reilly’s “most intimate book yet”—we at Amalgam thought it timely to look back and refresh our memories: to find out what this larger-than-life media figure thinks about the present moment in American history, and of course, examine where he thinks we have gone so terribly wrong. To do that, we asked several University of Virginia graduate students to read and review O’Reilly last book, Culture Warrior—a book in which, according to his website, O’Reilly “clearly fights the good fight for the soul of America.”

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