

9 Festival as Ritual and Ritual in Festival

Sounding “Exotic Borderlands” in Northern Taiwan

Tasaw Hsin-chun Lu

Abstract

This chapter looks at the ways in which a diverse Yunnan community in Northern Taiwan tactically uses music, dance, and rituals to embody a cross-border culture and boost local tourism. This group comprises people of different ethnicities, cultures, religions, and linguistic traditions from the Thai-Myanmar borderlands who have come into contact at the political, economic, social, and cultural margins. In recent years, they have drawn from peculiar religious components from the Thai-Myanmar borderlands in order to turn their marginality to advantage. Using artistically and technologically creative devices, they have successfully developed a spectacular commercial zone named “Enchanted Golden Triangle” (*meili ginsanjiao*). It has also been termed an “exotic borderland” (*yiyu*) and has become a sought-after destination for cultural tourism.

Keywords: Yunnan community, cultural tourism, Golden Triangle, transformativity of sound, Lost Army

The Rice Noodles Festival of Taoyuan in Northern Taiwan reshapes and reproduces ritual sounds and dance traditions in order to perform notions of ethnicity, identity, and heritage. It can be considered as ritual because such tourist festivals are sites where important cultural symbolism is displayed and performed. Symbolically they represent the natural environment, the surroundings, and beliefs of special significance to a group (Cooley 1999, 31–32). In this sense, the festival can be treated as “religious” events, as widely defined in the introduction of this book—as they embody relationships among people, places, and non-human forces. These relationships are particularly significant for a diasporic group living in new ethnopolitical

and cultural surroundings: migrants perform festivals as annual rites to (re)define these relationships. Such festivals, like rituals, work as regular events to mark boundaries, shape identities, and sketch a past that ought to be remembered (Brown 1997, Wong 2004).

Tourist festivals and rituals are also alike because they are both sites where transformation, or efficacy, happens (Cooley 1999, 31). The crucial quality of this transformation is “liminality.” Drawing from Van Gennep, Victor Turner (1969, 94) elaborated the idea of liminality in his widely-cited study of rituals. The key attribute of liminality is transitional and entails the possibility of transformation to take place within all kinds of liminal spaces. Whether premodern carnivals or modern public festivals, regulations could be temporarily lifted (Bakhtin 1984), social hierarchies could be reversed (Bennett and Woodward 2014), and the ritual could become dynamically performative (Cannadine 1983). Notably, the ways of articulating the transformativity amongst immigrant groups appear to be highly experimental and innovative.

This chapter explores the two aforementioned aspects of “festivals as rituals” exemplified in the modern-day East Asian festival context. In the first focus, it discusses how an immigrant community reinvents ritual music and dance to represent themselves to other peoples during a process of social cohesion in a tourism building project. Certain characteristics from their ancestors’ musical traditions have been commodified into cultural products for tourists to experience in order to reinforce the self-representation. In the second focus, this study examines the ritual efficacy of sound, body, and movement. It looks into how sounds and dance movements are designed in this tourist festival to embody a ritual that could be experienced, sensed, and culturally perceived, as well as how it is powerfully transformative. Apart from “festivals as rituals,” the (re)invention of rituals *in* festivals is also explored to shed light on the community members’ creativity in re-enacting rituals drawn from traditions.

The Rice Noodles Festival was launched in 2011 in Longgang, a small town in Taoyuan city. Given the significant support from both the city government and local merchants, this festival has emerged as a much sought-after tourist destination for the exhibition of its exotic delicacies and rich minority cultures. Its cultural peculiarity derives from a group of KMT (Kuomintang, or Nationalist) veterans, composed of Han Yunnanese and ethnic highlanders who fled from the Thai-Myanmar borderlands in the 1950s. Drawing on an ethnographic study conducted from 2016 to 2019, this chapter will demonstrate that a musical genre, the *dage* 打歌, has been chosen as a primary sonic and visual marker to perform a festive culture as

representative for this group. Literally “singing and dancing together,” *dage* is originally a popular musical form transnationally diffused in the Thai-Myanmar borderlands. By no means monotypic, it presents an enormous variety of music styles, dance movements, costumes, rituals, and linguistic traditions, with each form offering an insight into the culture of its ethnic origins. Yet *dage*, in its recontextualization into Taiwan, has now emerged as a cross-ethnic symbol of this group. The cross-ethnic nature was drawn on the group’s effort in representing the community as *one* to the outsiders. With homogenization of *dage*, it can now stand as representative for a large group of Han Yunannese plus ethnic highlander people in Taiwan. Different modes of *dage* are devised in a spatial and temporal framework of the festivals as a means of boosting its social solidarity, tourist commodification, and ritual efficacy.

The present study examines this creative invention. The invention is a collective endeavor to forge through musicscape and visual imaginary a perceivable tradition that is more commodifiable and captivating than an obsolete, distant ceremony. This creative process helps sounding and choreographing the “exotic borderlands” (*yi-yu*) represented in the festival. As a result, this event has succeeded in attracting numerous visitors from all over Taiwan: it has become a popular annual tourist and leisure site in the area, inviting many bus tours and engaging various tourist packages. These visitors are mostly urban residents who seek novel cultural experiences.

In the process of *dage* invention, how are different musical sounds, body movements, and related spatiotemporal concepts that have originated in distinctive ethnic traditions programmed in a new ritual performance? How do multiple cultural and sociopolitical factors—including a post-frontier status, the demand for identity construction, and the hybridity of different ethnocultural values—shape the process of recontextualization? These are the main questions that I will address.

Background: *Gujun* (the Lost Army) and its frontier history

Commonly known in Taiwan as the Lost Army (*gujun*), this group was brought from an area generally known as the Golden Triangle. As with many cross-border ethnic groups in that region—such as the Tai, Lisu, and Jingpo, each with complex subgroups of their own—these highlanders never really fit under a rigid ethnocultural label. They hold varying traditions and perform their cultures in different ways. Scholars specializing in that region often find these ways of cultural performance strategic relative to



Figure 9.1 Ethnic groups in the Golden Triangle region in the 1950s (Created by the author).

these groups' social, political, and economic motives (Fairfield 2019, McKinnon 2003). Therefore, "culture is not just a 'way of life' but also something 'consciously cultivated and performed'" (McKinnon 2003, 81).

The community that I worked with formed in response to China's turbulent political history along its frontier. This group refers to KMT troops who lost to the Communist Red Army during the Chinese Civil War in 1949. While most Nationalist soldiers fled east to Taiwan in the face of Communist advances, the KMT's 93rd Division commanded by General Li Mi retreated west from the southwestern Chinese province of Yunnan into Myanmar. They hoped to stage forays into China one day. At the outset, this battalion was primarily composed of Han Chinese. When traveling alongside the borderlands, this group recruited a good number of Han Chinese living in Kokang region in Myanmar, thus recognized as Kokang Han. A diversity of ethnic highlanders also joined due to troop reorganization, outpost-shifting, and inter-ethnic marriages.

This military plot never succeeded. But its once strong power had created tensions on the borders. Under UNESCO's negotiation, the KMT government operated three withdrawals to Taiwan during the 1950s and 1970s. Totalling more than seven thousand, the early Lost Army veterans and their descendants were resettled into Military Dependents' Housing in Longgang

in Taoyuan. This housing not only accommodated several thousands of Han veterans, but also dozens of ethnic Bai, Lisu, Akha, Tai, and Jingpo people, who were mostly the wives of these soldiers (Hsieh 1993). Such intercultural ties have brought a sense of hybridity and diversity into this community, particularly through the vitality of cultural traditions of their ethnically diverse women members.

However, prior to 2000, the community's interculturality was not featured in the public discourse by the community. Instead, to raise social awareness about these soldiers and their descendants who still lived in the Golden Triangle region, the community in Longgang (Taiwan) chose to adopt a cultural image of themselves based on the undesirable aspects of their frontier life: drug abuse, statelessness, refugee status far from their homes, and resource-poor conditions. Moreover, in the entertaining industry, the reputed novel *Yiyu* ("Exotic Borderlands," 1961) by Bo Yang (1920–2008) and the film version of *Yiyu* with the same Chinese title (English: "A Home Too Far," 1990) by Chu Yen-Ping also helped form this public image of this group. In addition, the KMT-controlled territories in the Golden Triangle region were one of the world's largest opium cultivation and drug trafficking areas throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Therefore, local Taiwanese have been fascinated by this group due to their perception of it as a mysterious, drug lord-governed society. Their marginalized socioeconomic status became the overarching trope.

A turning point: *Dage* becomes a cross-ethnic cultural marker

The 2000s saw a drastic turn for the *gujun* community. Under the state's city development program, their veteran housing was demolished and replaced with a private, upscale apartment complex, which none of the veterans could afford, so they all had to move out. Losing their community dwellings soon triggered a cultural crisis. They began to represent themselves to outsiders in a new way. In addition to showcasing the distressing aspects of their lives, they found some uplifting and entertaining characteristics of their ethnocultural diversity worth preserving. These have emerged into a hybridized culture defined by a variety of ethnic cuisines, festivals, music, and dance. The Rice Noodles Festival and *dage* are the most noteworthy characteristics.

The annual Rice Noodles Festival (Migan Jie) has proved very successful. It features a type of wide, flat noodle made of rice known as *migan*, which is a staple food cross-ethnically in Yunnan. Not a longstanding tradition, the

festival was launched in 2011 to promote this local food delicacy. Soon after, what started as a single-day community event has blossomed into a vibrant festival scheduled on two successive weekends in April. Each weekend is designed with specific themes drawn from different festival traditions: the first weekend's theme is the Water Splash and the following weekend's is the Fire Dance, which features Tai people's Water Festival and Yi people's Torch Festival, respectively. For the festival's transformation to take effect in forging a perceivable tradition for the community and the visitors, a set of *dage* repertory pieces have been created as an indispensable visual and sonic thread throughout.

However, what looks like a fully-fledged dance style today in Longgang is, in fact, the result of a very recent revival. Back in the 1990s, *dage* started dying out since the first Lost Army generation no longer practiced it. Yet in the 2000s, the aforementioned crisis of cultural awareness prompted the *dage* revival. It has gained traction as an aesthetic, political, and ritual practice after a decade of inactivity. This revival entails what the local community has perceived as the two *dage* traditions: one is Kokang *dage*, led by the descendants of Kokang Han veterans. They have striven to preserve several traditional types, each associated with specific musical modes, dance steps, and melodic patterns accompanied by flute (*dizi*), mouth organ (*sheng*), and three-string fiddle (*sanxuan*) played live (Hsia 2012). The other revival was steered by a group of highlander women, mostly Lisu, Jingpo, and Tai. What they have promoted is composed of various *dage* styles from these ethnic origins, all accompanied by commercial sound recordings of neotraditional music the women brought from their hometowns in Yunnan. Compared to the Kokang *dage*, these dance forms are generally livelier with uplifting rhythms and more hand gestures.

The ways *dage* have been incorporated into the festival offer us a window to investigate the intersection of sound, public space, and ritualization. Four types of *dage* sonic experiences—such as the sounds played live, the sounds played mediated, the dance that is seen, and the dance that incorporates the audience—create a unique music-scape upon which the festival can enact transformations in the participants.

***Dage* sounds as ambient**

The layout of the festival space can be divided into two sections based on the analysis of this study (see Figure 9.2): one is secular space, where commercial activities and sensory pleasures such as dining take place; the

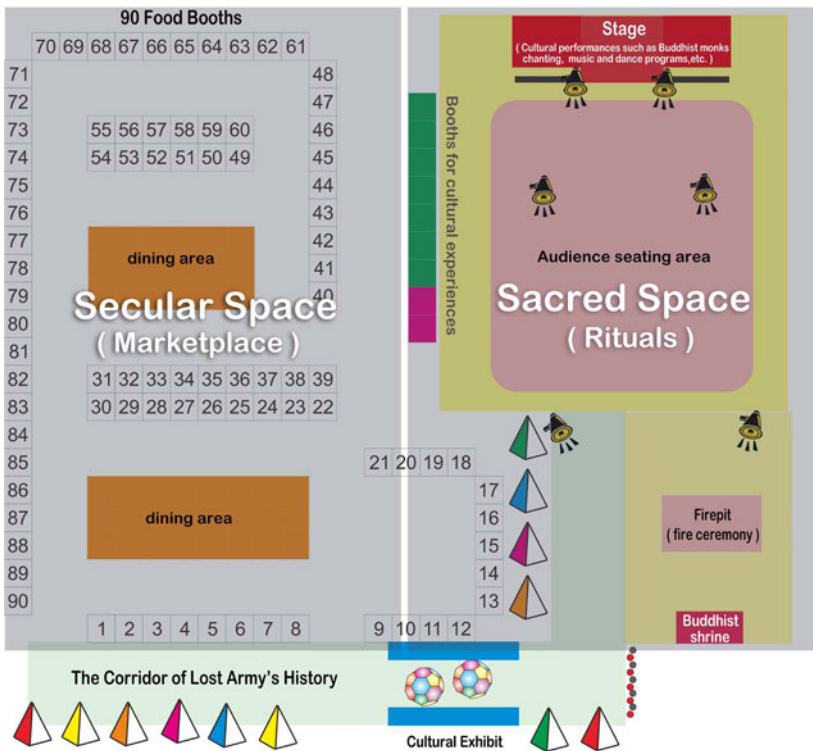


Figure 9.2 Layout of the Rice Noodles Festival in 2019 (Created by the author).

other is sacred space where a Theravada Buddhist shrine and a ceremonial firepit are set up and all rituals take place. Theravada Buddhists from the local community often come to the shrine for worship, offering fruits and flowers. These religious acts make this space explicitly sacred.

When there are no events on the program, visitors are free to shop for food or enjoy any cultural experiences that each booth offers in the marketplace. During that time, a sound recording amplified by multiple speakers serves as background music across the adjacent sacred space. As noted in Jonathan Sterne's study, while the programmed music, or the muzak, of the commercial space is not meant for "contemplative listening," it is also not always heard in an entirely passive fashion—"rather, it tends to pass in and out of the foreground of a listener's consciousness" (1997, 25). In the Rice Noodles Festival, what appears to be an ambiguous use of sound during these time slots is actually explicit in two aspects.

First, despite its main design as backdrop, the background music is loud enough to be heard. The recordings that the organizers deliberately chose

for each day are culturally defined—often the music is performed by a typical ensemble from the Golden Triangle region comprising the gourd mouth organ, bronze gongs, cymbals, and elephant-foot drum.



Audiovisual sample 9.1

Recorded by Luting Hsia in Longgang Grand Sports Field during the Rice Noodles Festival, April 29, 2018. Used with permission by the Yunnanese Dage Association.

However, this music is not recognizable to Taiwanese visitors in terms of which specific ethnic group and which ensemble the music belongs to. The boisterous sounds, together with the pungent smell of the spices and the ethnic scene filled with people dressed in ethnic costumes, set an exotic and cheerful tone for the festival's overall ambiance of the secular space and time.

Second, the programmed music (pre-recorded in a sequence and played from speakers as background music) is comprised of two to three songs from the Golden Triangle's generic ensembles played in the same sequence over and over again. The goal of this design is to familiarize the visitors with the sounds, so that they can dance *dage* to the same music in the afternoon when invited. This is the ambiguity of listening as the sound passes in and out of the foreground of a listener's consciousness that makes it possible for the listener to cultivate an understanding of the sounds as essential to the exotic borderland.

“Dage Parade” as a transitional event from the secular to the sacred

The Dage Parade is scheduled to take place prior to any sacred ceremonies, either before the Buddhist chanting of the Water Festival or before the Torch Festival's flame lighting ceremony. It denotes a transitional act to move the festival spectators from the secular space and time into the sacred. One way the Dage Parade transits, also the most effective way, is to shift the sonic-spatial structural levels from the back to the fore. Once the Dage Parade begins, the background music stops. It is replaced by music performed live, whether acoustic or amplified. In this shift of sonic structural level, the liveliness created by the *dage* music transforms the festival's public

soundscape from the background to the foreground. The sounds are now sharper and clearer. Take the Tai's Water Festival as an example. Not until the acoustic sounds of an incessant clang and a deep yet penetrating drone begin, does the music come to the foreground and become the focus of potential listeners.



Audiovisual sample 9.2

Videotaped by Luting Hsia in Longgang Grand Sports Field during the Rice Noodles Festival, April 20, 2019. Used with permission by the Yunnanese Dage Association.

Meanwhile, this transition can also be experienced in a more bodily fashion. Regardless of whether listeners are far or near, the sound draws their attention while calling for assembly. The parade then leads the audience from the secular marketplace to the sacred stage where the ceremony or worship takes place (Figure 9.3). Participants follow a specially designed pathway—named “The Corridor of the Lost Army’s History.” Joining the procession through the corridor, teeming with displays of historical photos, maps, and narration about the life of Lost Army on the Thai-Myanmar border, the audience symbolically transit from the present time and space to the era of the Lost Army (Figure 9.4).



Figure 9.3 The parade leads the audience into the secular marketplace (Used with permission by the Yunnanese Dage Association, 2019).



Figure 9.4 Left: “The Corridor of the Lost Army’s History”; Right: Deer Dance and Kinnari Dance in the Dage Parade (Photographs by the author, 2019).

In order to effect the transition, modifications are applied in how *dage* is performed. The typical circle that *dage* forms is transformed into lines. This allows the crowds to move physically from one place to another. Also, to mark *dage* as a cultural label for this Lost Army group, the Dage Parade is designed to be held throughout the two weekends of the festival despite the fact that *dage* is never part of the Water Festival tradition. It is presented in a form where *dage* dancers perform in a procession with the Deer Dance and Kinnari Dance, two quintessential folk-dance items of the Water Festival celebration for Tai people. Most intriguing is that this form of *dage* signals ideas of hybridity, exemplified in the integration of a flexible set of Water Festival hand gestures, such as Flower Blossom, into typical *dage* footwork.

Normally midway through the Dage Parade, the live performance will be replaced with a series of *dage* dances accompanied by sound recordings. At this time the visitors are welcome to join the parade dancing. “Stomping” and “Jumping with feet” are frequently used *dage* items. The Dage Parade does not end until the visitors are brought to the sacred site where the ritual is about to begin. Until that point, the soundscape had not been transformed into a holy one. Once the administrative official, normally the city mayor, appears to join the leader of the ceremony by dancing the *dage* piece “Golden snake dance” as a symbolic gesture to inaugurate the worship, the festival scene will come to a climax with a sonic change. For example, the sacred sound of the Water Festival is the Theravada Buddhist chanting led by Burmese monks who reside in Taiwan. A stark contrast to the exuberant and festive Dage Parade, the Buddhist mantra is meditative and less melismatic in melody. In an act of spiritual participation, Theravada Buddhist devotees often recite with the monks while posing the *pranamasana* hand gesture toward the divine.

The “Dage Parade” in this festival is used as an interim act enabling visitors to transit from the secular to the sacred through the aural, visual, and bodily

changeover. In that, the aural shift from the mediated sonic background to the acoustic foreground particularly works as a soundmark. It holds great allure to assemble the visitors and takes them across the threshold of the Lost Army's history to ultimately enter the "exotic borderland." Then the ritual sound commences.

This celebrative parade is flexible, allowing dance components from different highlanders of the Golden Triangle region to intermingle in a playful fashion. This playful way of hybridizing and displaying culture is crafted to fulfill the visitors' stereotypes held about minorities from Yunnan Province as multiethnic, carefree, and ebullient people. On the one hand, the ritualization of this tourist festival reinforces the pre-existing stereotypes in the mainstream Taiwanese society. On the other hand, the Yunnanese community has proudly appropriated these cultural stereotypes and integrated them into innovative music and dance performances as tools for recognition and assertion.

Dage as a ritual performance

In the ritual contexts, *dage* captures the imagination of Taiwanese visitors. It also facilitates the formulation of "exotic borderlands" as mysterious yet captivating. This is achieved by certain performative archetypes associated with the festival that aestheticize the culture of exotic borderlands through structured ritualistic *dage* acts. This structure is firmly plotted into a ritual sequence, of which all components, including music and dance, appear to be fixed, performing what tourists perceive as an ancient and animistic rite. This differs from the dance movements used in the Dage Parade, which are flexible and playful.

What is deemed as tradition based on Yi's Fire God rite, however, is a new construction. The dance choreography and the related program of rituals were all freshly created when launched. On the Torch Festival night, the two items "Bonfire Dance" and "Fire God Worship Dance" have been coined as the essential ritual acts since the festival's launch in 2014 (Figure 9.5). They are designed to be intrinsic to the flame-lighting ceremony and the Fire God worship, respectively. Their performance tends to remain the same until today in order to reinforce the perception of a timeless and unaltered tradition.

This rite denotes the festival's climax, with a procession of dancers in circles to ignite the bonfire. Once the fire is lit, the dazzling performances of the "Bonfire Dance" and "Fire God Worship Dance" are introduced to



Figure 9.5 “Fire God Worship Dance” (Photograph by the author, 2016).

the visitors, one after the other, with a narrative depicting the dances as an ancient folk tradition. For example, when the visitors are guided to pray to the supernatural being for blessings, the “Bonfire Dance” is performed as the embodiment of an animistic rite. The dance movements, composed of numerous heavy stomps and jumps with swift twists and turns, are all executed while dancers circle the bonfire at a fast pace. The music that accompanies this *dage* has an underlying rhythmic ostinato created by drumming and clapping throughout.



Audiovisual sample 9.3

Videotaped by the author in Yunnanese Cultural Park during the Rice Noodles Festival, 14 April 2017. Used with permission by the Yunnanese Dage Association.

The reverberating sound, along with the rotating dancers in action, is meant to reinforce the ritual power. The tale of Yi’s fire god and the god’s power in the announcer’s narration advance the level of the sacredness of the event, the space, and the related *dage* dance items. Furthermore, according to the choreographer Huang Zhi-wen, second-generation descendant of the Lost Army, “Bonfire Dance” is formulated into more elaborate dance

steps than other *dage* items in order to produce greater artistic effect in the ritual setting.

The earsplitting and penetrating sounds of drumming and mouth organ played from the speakers all evoke our spirits. We dance with hand summons and body jumps as prayers to respond. These ritualistic items have been maintained unchanged every year since 2014 to make it feel like a tradition. (Huang 2019)

Notwithstanding an invention, this tradition is articulated through the annual body performance, through which the sonic, visual, and the narrative displays of the culture, with the backdrop of the dark night, have all contributed to what visitors often perceive as mysterious. Visitors find such display culturally distant, yet captivating and welcoming. One can say this performance of culture steers the visitors' imagination toward an exotic place, or "exotic borderlands."

"Dage Funfest" as a bodily experienced ritual

Dage Funfest is designed to allow all visitors to join *dage* and experience the culture. This activity is scheduled every night throughout the festival period as the final event taking place right after a one-hour gala show. The program and timeline have been kept consistent over the past few years, making the events predictable for the visitors. Furthermore, this activity aims to create a high level of cultural intensity as a transformative experience for the visitors. One crucial transformative capability of this *dage* experience is to shift the visitors' position from audience members to ritual performers. This transformation is carried out when one practices *dage* for an extended amount of time in a circle, creating collective bodily unison, further empowered by cultural contextualization offered by the announcer.

Kokang style, the *dage* form used in this event, sets up a tone for the ritual performance. It starts with a few male elders who perform Kokang *dage* live onstage. They dance while playing music accompanied by a vocalist singing melodies. Without a doubt, the live, unsophisticated ensemble music and voice contrast with the commercially recorded music that accompanies the dazzling gala shows onstage right before this finale. The stark contrast illustrates a return to the archetypes. The archetypes of festival, music, and dance are exemplified in the senior figure, simplicity, and low-tech delivery in this *dage* performance. Soon after, the staged performance is shifted to

the ground when they leave the stage. Then all dancers and other Lost Army community members begin to join in line, while visitors are encouraged to participate. Together with dancing, the locals also sing along. The syllabic Kokang *dage* style, manifested in concurrent singing, instrumental playing, and footwork, intends to lead all participants to form a circle (“*yuan*” 圓 in Chinese). The rotating crowd, as explained by the announcer, embodies the festival’s satisfying finale (“*yuan man*” 圓滿 in Chinese).



Audiovisual sample 9.4

Videotaped by Luting Hsia in Longgang Grand Sports Field during the Rice Noodles Festival, 23 April 2017. Used with permission by the Yunnanese Dage Association.

This circle represents not only the perfect completion of the festival’s grand finale; when people get closer to form a circle through *dage*, they are all closer together to pray for the god’s blessing, peace, happiness, and all the best in the future. The embodiment of praying in dance is (re)confirmed through the body moving round and round. By listening closely to the simple and steady music, all participants become worshippers and, slowly but surely, attain a certain level of contentment. On several tourists’ travel blogs, “Dage Funfest” was described as a memorable experience. In the words of Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, in an “experience economy,” “experience” can orchestrate memorable events for the customers, and that memory itself becomes the product. The memory indicates a mixture of remembering the bodily experiences, the feelings of pleasure and satisfaction, and most unforgettably, the fun of dancing together with the locals.

Given the multiethnic nature of this community, such a cultural show tends to stress a culture as homogenized and hybrid instead of elucidating ethnic particularities. No specific ethnic markers are identified in the narratives other than a generic term, “Yunnanese.” Yet, as confirmed by the organizers, this place of Yunnan, as portrayed in the festival, is used as an umbrella term to encapsulate various distinctive ethnic groups across the Yunnan–Thai–Myanmar border.

“Our Yunnan is not the Yunnan referred as the one in mainland China, but an ‘exotic borderland’ of Western Yunnan”, said one organizer of the festival, Wang Lu-fei, in 2017. She emigrated to Taiwan when she was six with her Lost Army father from Mae Salong in Northern Thailand. This illustrates that the imaginary of this place created through the *dage* performances is also embodied amongst the new generations of the Lost Army. Most of them are

now second- and third-generation descendants who have not yet returned to the borderlands where their ancestors temporarily stayed in the 1950s. This imaginary, through recalling and appropriating a past, is performed through the *dage* bodily practices to construct an imagined nostalgia that tends to even out the differences of ethnic diversity, between old and new, past and present. The imaginary has helped them forge a new sense of “exotic borderlands,” presently known as the “enchanted Golden Triangle” (*meili jinsanjiao*) in Taiwan that the Lost Army community may carry on. This sense of homeland echoes what Carola Lorea calls “performance of homeland” in her study of Bengali refugees in the Andaman Islands: a homeland almost nobody has actually visited, but that nevertheless exists in the performance of songs in the diasporic context of borderland people (Lorea 2017). This homeland is not tied to a specific, fixed geopolitical place, but rather existed as “a shared sense of utopian, historical and territorial origins” (ibid.) constantly reconstructed through performance.

In this ongoing process, the sonic and visual image of a specific *dage* culture becomes reified as an intrinsic cultural label. It has been an indispensable highlight of tourist events, cultural shows, and also routine weekly community practice sessions. With a new music repertory drawn from a blending of what older generations have passed down and the current have created, the *dage* practice forms a new paradigm of musical culture for new generations to retain as their heritage.

Conclusion: Sounding “exotic borderlands”

This essay has demonstrated how *dage* plays a central role in the way the Lost Army group defines its relations with other peoples, places, and the larger socio-cultural environment by constructing heritage in a tourist festival. In the construction, (mediated) sounds, bodily movements, and spatial configurations dynamically constitute a ritual as tradition that can be multisensorially experienced by both tourists and Lost Army members. Different *dage* forms have not only been employed to mediate a new sense of place, but also to culturally assert a multiethnic immigrant group in Northern Taiwan and to sustain the cultural beliefs, values, and sounds that this group deems important.

As an umbrella musical form culturally shared by most Lost Army descendants, *dage* is represented as a cross-ethnic label. This results from informal cultural ties and mutual influences amongst their ancestors who once lived on the Thai-Myanmar border. Today, performing a cross-ethnic

social and cultural identity by de-emphasizing ethnic particularities becomes key in their efforts to unite and achieve recognition. As in the tourist venture, diverse sounds, social imaginaries, and the body movements of performing *dage* from different ethnic origins have been integrated into a ritualistic setting and become the festival's core framework through which the visitors are able to undergo a transformative experience. Neither the Lost Army group nor visitors seek the "untainted original and humankind's relationships with the natural environment" as promoted in China's prevailing notion of *yuanshengtai* (original ecology) (Kendall 2017; 2019). Apart from that, they do not quest for cultural authenticity in ethnic origin. The general understanding is that the historical and geocultural inaccessibility of this Lost Army group to their frontier's past makes it hard to seek authenticity. As a result, with little questioning, the Dage Parade and Dage Funfest are newly constructed as two essential programs each day of the festival.

For this immigrant group, annual festivals as rituals—and rituals *in* festivals—are ways to reconnect to their ancestors, homelands, pasts, and cultural traditions that they had to leave behind. Annual festivals also define their relationships with their new surroundings, new peoples (mostly Hokkien and Hakka Han peoples living in Northern Taiwan), new sociopolitical arenas, and new cultural contexts. Thus, *dage* has forged the nostalgia for the ancestors' shared past in the Golden Triangle borderlands, through which they articulate their cultural and social identities in the present. As described by Brown, "annual institutions performed over the course of changing time, festivals work as boundary stones, marking territory, staking claims, and declaring meanings, and as historical events, cobbled from traces of the past" (1997, xix).

The group's self-interpretations of their frontier history—as well as of the ritual and the prayers—dynamically generates a transformative efficacy. Moving away from the tragic aspects of their lives, which were previously associated with drug use, refugee status, and marginalization, these representations emphasize ethnic unity, cultural heritage, and a collective past. As written by the organizer from the community on the festival's official Facebook webpage:

Farewell to the exotic borderlands of the Golden Triangle! Now we are rooted in Taiwan's new Golden Triangle. The heritage from our frontier past has been creatively transformed into new styles; and we have woven our torments of warfare into mesmerizing memories. The fusion of multiethnic cultures has grown with splendid sparks, and evolved into cutting-edge forms over time. (2016)

Borrowing from Timothy Cooley, I argue that *dage* is an enactment of heritage created in performance by a group “that has recourse to the past (preservation) and creates a new cultural production in the present (invention)” (Cooley 1999, 40). Through the cyclical repetition of these events, displayed to tourists and locals, “one can observe the circular nature of heritage. Performed tradition becomes the tradition; the representation becomes the actuality. Heritage begins to reference heritage” (ibid.). This dynamic balance between preservation and invention is key to understand the modern creation of rituals as “performative acts with the intention of preserving a memory, a belief system, a way of life...” (ibid.).

Today, the Rice Noodles Festival has become a sought-after destination for visitors to experience a foreign culture while allowing the local community members to express aspects of their cultural legacy drawn from their frontier’s past. In short, the creative reinvention of sounding and choreographing *dage* has not only facilitated local tourism, but has also transformed their community-making narratives, from a grim past into a soundful cultural spectacle that symbolizes the arrival of a bright, new day.

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About the author

Tasaw Hsin-chun Lu is Associate Research Fellow at the Institute of Ethnology in Taiwan's Academia Sinica. She received her PhD in ethnomusicology from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her scholarly interests focus on issues of migration, tourism, and soundscape formation with a principal geo-cultural specialty on Burma/Myanmar and its diasporas.