Abstract

Early Taiwanese folk songs faithfully reflect the political, social, economic and cultural aspects of Taiwanese society. As such, understanding the historical background of how those songs were created can broaden our understanding of Taiwanese culture and history. However, with the passing of time, the Taiwanese folk songs appeared to lose their ground, and the line between folk songs and pop songs blurred. It is most likely due to the transition of the Taiwanese society from an authoritarian regime into democracy since the 80’s. In the sudden absence of cultural repression and taboos, pop songs became the preferred format for Taiwanese songwriters to express themselves. Thus, modern Taiwanese pop music represents the new Taiwanese generation: both rebellious and self-assured. It also reflects a new style of song writing and serves as snapshots of the ever-changing Taiwanese society.

Ever since the 80’s, many songwriters expressed their views on democracy and their love for Taiwanese people and culture in their songs. This article focuses on two of the most important songwriters in this era: Chen Ming-chang, Tsai Chen-nan. Although both artists conveyed their strong feelings for Taiwan through their songs, the two songwriters chose distinctive topics, adopted different melodic styles, and interpreted divergent images of the New Taiwan. Therefore, this article begins with a brief history of the Taiwanese folk songs, followed by a discussion of the influence of Taiwanese language and grass-root movements to Taiwanese folk songs and in-depth analyses of the distinctive creative styles of the two artists.

Nowadays under the heavy influence of Western culture, few Taiwanese youths understand Taiwanese culture, nor do they appreciate the beauty of Taiwanese art and language. Therefore, this article is written as a means to re-introduce Taiwanese grass-root culture to Taiwanese youths.

Keywords: Chen Ming-chang, Tsai Chen-nan, Taiwan folk songs, New Taiwanese folk song movement, Taiwan image