

Material for 21F.109 Chinese Streamlined III

Title of the songs: Longde Chuanren, *Heirs of the Dragon*

Instructor 1: The original verse of this song were written by a Taiwan born singer/songwriter Hou Dejian in December 1978 in response to the American decision to break off diplomatic relations with Republic of China (Taiwan) and establish relations with People's Republic of China. *Heirs of the Dragon* belongs to a musical genre, *Fresh Campus Folksong*, which started around 1970 and became very popular during 80s in Taiwan. This new genre was very different from the mainstream western and Japanese-influenced lounge music at the time. Most songs in this genre were written and sung by college students, and the instruments use to perform these songs were acoustic guitars. *Fresh Campus Folksong* promotes genuine feelings, expresses concerns for social issues and celebrates nature and Chinese traditions. With the popularity of this new musical genre, *Heirs of the Dragon* was an instant hit and quickly became a patriotic song at the height of the protest of the Chinese people in Taiwan against the American government's diplomatic decision. Some Taiwanese politicians at the time actively promoted the song in order to arouse the sense of ethnic pride of the Chinese people in Taiwan. However, Hou Dejian's metaphor of growing up "under the claw of the dragon" in fact implied an ambivalent attitude toward Chinese traditions. Hou once said that the song actually expressed his profound frustration with the Chinese traditions rather than romanticizing them as people thought. This song quickly found its way to Mainland China and became very popular among young people there. In the spring of 1989, *Heirs of the Dragon* was sung in the student movement in Tiananmen Square .

Instructor 2: Hou moved to Beijing in the mid 1980s even though at that time people from Taiwan were still not allowed to visit the Mainland. (He went to the US first.) To the Mainlanders, the song meant 2 things. First, as descendants of the dragon, Chinese people should not forget the humiliation under foreign aggression, and should make China stronger. Secondly, the fact that Hou left Taiwan made most Mainlanders feel that a lot of people living in Taiwan longed to see the unification of Taiwan and Mainland China. I talked with Instructor 1 when she decided to use this song. What was most interesting to me was that I had never thought that Hou wanted to express his frustration with the Chinese traditions. After the Tian'anmen student movement, Hou moved back to Taiwan.

Instructor 1: In 2000, Chinese American Alexander LeeHom Wang reinvented the song by adding an English-language rap and changing the last verse to reference the experience of Taiwanese immigrants in United States instead of an event signifying China's humiliations. Wang revived the original song with a different energy, and it was an instant hit. He mixed several musical styles together and transformed a melancholic nationalistic song into a decadent pop song with a mixture of heavy metal and hip-hop. A sense of belonging and ethnic identity is prevalent in Wang's version, which is no longer about nationalistic sentiment but more about struggles and experiences on a personal level.

LeeHom Wang's version of *Heirs of the Dragon* is clearly a product of Wang's own cultural hybridization. As a Chinese-American, with a cultural and educational background that was not exclusively Chinese, he carefully positioned himself for marketing to the Chinese audience. He is a sensation in the Chinese music market and is quite popular among young Chinese-American communities. The purpose of adopting this material for my class is to generate meaningful cultural discussions by comparing the two versions of the songs in terms of musical genre, time periods, political settings and cultural references.

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