

YUNNAN REGGAE: MUSIC AND POLITICS

A Thesis

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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DECEMBER 2016

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank Professor Prahlad for his thoughtful advice and encouragement that helped me through graduate school, and writing this thesis. Words cannot express how his mentorship and positive vibration have shaped me into a better person in school and in life.

I would like to thank Professor Lawless for her heuristic guidance and heartfelt warmth that spark and deepen my interest in folklore and literature. She is a role model for female students in higher education to be strong, independent, and beautiful.

I would like to thank Professor Dunkley for his unique perspectives in the study of reggae and Rastafari that inspired me greatly in my own thinking. His dedication in this field, and his willingness to help, provide me the best motivation and exemplification to keep going.

I would also like to thank Mark Nicolais for his consistent support and companionship that made writing, learning, and living joyful and meaningful. His stimulating thoughts, his kindness and care are precious gifts in my life.

Finally, I would like to thank Lao Han and the band members of Kawa for their openness, generosity, and hospitality. They have established a temporary home for me in Yunnan, and have showed me “abundance of water” and new possibilities in life.

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Introduction

Reggae music, from its birth in 1960s Jamaica to the current day, has gone through considerable changes and spread global influences. Since The Wailer's release of *Catch A Fire* in 1973 that hit the world stage, reggae has become a popular international music genre (Manuel & Neely 44). Today, reggae is present in all corners of the world with a wide variety of sound ranging from imitation to reinterpretation, appropriation to acculturation. As a result, the mighty message in roots reggae is inevitably used or abused by non-Jamaican cultures, either contributing to their pursuit of truth and formation of identity, or reduced into subcultural signs for consumption and exploitation. The key to analyze and evaluate contemporary reggae not only lies in the music, but also in the context behind music, including the life of musicians and the soil that nurtures them. Among the diverse subgenres of reggae created out of the fusion between reggae and non-Jamaican cultures, Chinese reggae is particularly unique and complex. Despite the recondite history of the Chinese influence on the production and commercialization of roots reggae in Jamaica during the 1950s and '60s, contemporary China provides an exemplary point of entry to study the international phase of reggae, marked by natural and artificial musical fusions. Among the plethora of worldwide reggae fusions, what is the current state of Chinese reggae? How does it come into being? Is it an appropriation of reggae or a genuine fusion that carries the mantle of roots reggae, and what is the implication? To explore these questions, it is necessary to first look at the music and message of reggae and compare it with Chinese reggae.

Roots Reggae and Theoretical Groundings

In simplest terms, Jamaican roots reggae embodies a movement from the low to the high, a pursuit of light from darkness. This movement is achieved through resistance against "Babylon," the corrupted earthly world, and an elevation toward "Zion," our heavenly home. On the lower end,

British colonialists introduced Babylonian values by brainwashing Jamaicans into believing white was right. This racial notion is closely tied to another power relation, class. Both ideologies worked together to produce structural oppression and discrimination in Jamaica, causing inequality, suffering, and traumatized minds that continued in the postcolonial period. Bob Marley sings about “Babylon” in his 1979 song, “Babylon System”: “Me say / de Babylon system is the vampire, falling empire, suckin’ the blood of the sufferers.” Here, “Babylon” is compared to an imperial vampire who sucks the blood and sweat of the enslaved people to keep it young and grand. It is motivated by greed, selfishness, hunger for control and power. Its pompous pandemonium – church and university – is built on pain of the builders, and used for continual deception of the “devil’s philosophy” in the name of religion and education; religious laws and debates about god weigh more than genuine faith in a higher force, and wisdom is cast away in the age of the intellect. The graduates of the “falling empire” perpetuate exploitation and deception, transmigrating in a cycle of oppression and suffering in darkness. In a theoretical lens, this part resembles postcolonialism that what the colonizers had done affect the colonized continually, especially through brainwashing.

However, the singers of reggae, the Rastas, do not remain stagnantly stuck in “Babylon” and grow bitter. Rather, they search for a higher ground, the spirit of liberation, *riddim* of positive vibration, the *irie-ation* of the *fyah* within the *Iyahman*, the original one.¹ This transcendental and empowering elevation, first and foremost, is achieved through music. As Bob Marley sings in “Chant Down Babylon” (1999), “Men see their dreams and aspiration crumble in front of their face, and all of their wicked intention to destroy the human race. And how I know – how I know – and that’s how I know: a reggae music, we chant down Babylon with music... Me

¹Here, I am using the Rastas’ language expression, dread talk, or Iyaric, which grows out of English. However, it modifies certain English words for a different pronunciation and implication, which is believed to achieve higher vibration.

say, Music you're the key." In this sense, the riddim of positive vibration in reggae is in and of itself a chant. Its very presence generates serenity and positivity that affect change and spread healing in reality. This tenet of Rastafari is described in the section "word/sound/power" from Anand Prahlaḍ's book *Reggae Wisdom* (2001) that draws a fundamental connection between word and sound, and the power it generates. He explains how the Rastas affect the vibrational nature of matters through music in a way unseen by human eyes (19). In this perspective, reggae's emphasis on the backbeat, as oppose to the downbeat in most western music, can be regarded as a tool for this effect. The usual downbeat focuses on 1 and 3, creating a strong rhythmic structure in the song, much like marching band music that expresses uniformity and constraint of marching in military style under the shadow of colonizing cultures (Brozman). On the contrary, backbeat's emphasis on 2 and 4 reacts and rebels against the downbeat, declaring a musical statement of resistance and changing the whole ambiance of the song. It also induces dance, and dance expresses freedom of movement and vital life – to kill death with life, the best antidote to chant down the falling empire of "Babylon." This music is "the voice of the Rastaman communicating to everyone" ("Chant Down Babylon") to resist sinful "Babylon" and cultivate virtue for "Zion."

Like symbol, music embodies and opens up to another world. On the one hand, this world is the oppressive context in Jamaica that provides the soil to produce genuine roots reggae. On the other hand, it is also Rastas' creative transformation of this context through their manipulation of the colonizer's religion, language and lifeways to achieve decolonization and elevation. Take religion as an example, Christianity, the colonizer's religion, was imposed upon the West Indian slaves as part of the British colonial project. However, the receiving end of colonialism did their own reading and reinterpreting of Christianity into Rastafari to resist Babylonian values in white Christianity. The Rastafarian god is Jah, believed to be the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie I, the

Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, who leads Rastas back to their heavenly home “Zion,” located in Ethiopia, the true Africa (Winders 62-63). This reinterpretation regards Jah as a black king, breaking the coercive notion of the white god. It also calls for repatriation and seeking roots, as oppose to being swayed by the western concept of heaven. Faith and reality, belief and action, religion and politics are closely connected in Rastafari because it grew out of oppression and serves to transform oppression at heart and in the world. The strong racial connotation in Rastafari reflects the Rastas’ struggle against racial discrimination and structural oppression, however, it is under the struggling condition the Rastas awaken from “Babylon,” striving to leave its operation, temptation and deception for a better place to love and rejoice – a movement from darkness to light. This notion can be found in reggae music, such as Bob Marley’s “Exodus” (1977) that describes the “movement of Jah people” toward “Zion,” and his prayerful, spiritual-like chant “Forever Loving Jah” (1980). The Rastas take what is imposed upon them –physical and mental oppression – and transcend it into other creative expressions that empower themselves and inspire others, like a lotus flower growing out of mud yet blossoming in purity and fragrance.

This transformation points to the other side of colonialism and postcolonialism. Contact between cultures and unequal exchange of power in fact provide a condition for the colonized people to resourcefully take whatever that nourishes as fuel to survive and thrive, generating agapic energy² out of the good and the bad that were put into them. What they lack in rights, power and possession in “Babylon” they make up with fights, strength and spiritual purification on the pilgrim of life, much like the process of turning charcoal into diamond. This is the way to make “Zion” on “Babylon,” to sing the songs of freedom amidst fists and fences.

Christopher Balme explains a similar concept in his theory “inventive syncretism,” originally

²“Agapic energy” is a term coined by contemporary social activist Diane Nash. It comes from the Ancient Greek term “Agape,” meaning the highest form of love, charity. Love, like other emotions, is believed to generate energy that affects reality.

proposed by anthropologist James Clifford in his book *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), in which he suggests to look at positive outcomes from cultural exchange, especially during the postcolonial period. He states,

In the conceptual world of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, clear cultural boundaries were essential for cementing identity, and expressed notions of difference and even superiority vis-à-vis other nations and cultures. In this world-view, which encapsulates the essence of colonialism in both its paternalistic and aggressive, exploitive manifestations, any suggestion of mingling and interchange was synonymous with dilution, deracination and breakdown. *Inventive syncretism*, on the other hand, assumes a view of cultural change that is fundamentally dynamic, that presupposes openness and a creative utilization of disparate, heterogeneous cultural products. Syncretism can thus be reinterpreted as one of the positive results of what has been the fundamentally destructive process of direct or indirect colonization and cultural imposition (Balme 9).

In this passage, Balme explains two kinds of mindsets. The first one emphasizes “clear cultural boundaries,” “differences” and “superiority” among different identities such as marked by race. This mindset resembles colonialism in the sense that colonial contact and exchange aim to serve “us” over “them,” and hence the exploitation and oppression of “them.” However, the second one assumes a boundariless world, especially given the modern and postmodern eras’ influence on diversity, where people can become one race – the human race, thus subverting the former power dynamic. Under this mindset, the world provides for open exchange and dynamic mingling of “disparate, heterogeneous cultural products” and create collectively for the better of all. This is the mindset and vision of inventive syncretism. Although reality is far worse than this vision given the destruction and trauma done by colonialism for 400 years, the traumatized people in Jamaica did not just become victims and give up during the postcolonial era. As seen in reggae, they react against colonial impositions with positive vibration, heal through music and open up closed minds therein. To a large extent, inventive syncretism is best used when “the philosophy which hold one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned” through

the resistance and victory of “good over evil” (“War/No More Trouble”).

Methodologically, inventive syncretism can be achieved through cultural reinterpretation (Balme 12). Reinterpretation means a change of mind, which affects change of action and meaning. This draws a perfect parallel with Rastafari’s method of elevating through transforming, decolonizing through reinterpreting. Balme quotes, “reinterpretation marks all aspects of cultural change. It is the process by which old meanings are ascribed to new elements or by which new values change the cultural significance of old forms. It operates internally, from generation to generation, no less than integrating a borrowed element into a receiving culture” (Herskovits qtd. in Balme 12). In essence, reinterpretation deals with how to adjust to changes brought by clashing of cultures over time, and recognize the fluidity of identity and power dynamics. The anthropologists need to challenge the traditional notion of “pure,” “untouched” cultures and accept their growth, and subsequently reassess ethnographic approaches (12-13), the natives also refine and redefine themselves and their relation to other cultures. In the context of Rastafari, through reinterpreting European inventions and reinventions such as Christianity, the Rastas made new meanings out of what is given, reformed their own culture and identities, and continue to fight against racial stereotypes and injustices using racists’ own tools. This is all built upon their almost alchemical process of inventively and flexibly using foreign, coercive cultures for their own benefit, even creating beauty out of the ugly.

The theory of inventive syncretism illuminates the process of decolonization through reassessing a changed power dynamic. It fits what the Rastas have done to redeem the race, but it needs to be incorporated with postcolonial theories for a balanced view on cultural exchange from both ends, especially when powers are not equal. Postcolonialism, as explained by Edward Said and Mary Louis Pratt, points to a binary social relation marked by an us-and-them dynamic. After

colonial destructions, the colonized people still struggle to reestablish themselves and work their way through the physical and mental traumas of colonialism. Therefore, postcolonial theories help to distinguish the exploiter/colonizer and the exploited/colonized dynamic and shed light on the remaining unequal power relations. When evaluating reggae outside of Jamaica, it is important to use both theories to recognize the relationship between roots reggae and its host culture – in this case, China, and then to look at what role do the hosts of reggae play in relation to itself (Chinese reggae) and others (roots reggae), whose interest and what kind of interest are they serving, and in what ways are they using reggae. At this point, it is logical to induce that those who adopt reggae should, at any rate, share similarities with reggae's context, and/or the way of reggae. In a broader sense, genuine music means the maker embodies what he makes, and non-genuine ones separate sound with the maker where music turns into a mere appropriation that is often shallow and hollow. In this light, the context behind Chinese reggae and the way in which musicians make something out of the context are key points for examination.

Chinese Reggae

Compared to all other countries, China has a unique historical context in relation to roots reggae that is worth mentioning. Since the 19th century, large groups of Hakka from Guangdong province boarded the ships to Jamaica at the port of Hong Kong. They became indentured laborers in Jamaica, and some started small businesses, such as incense shops, shoe stores, and recording studios. Vincent Chin, owner of Randy's Shop, was one of the earliest Chinese involved in the local Jamaican reggae scene. His studio and label recorded many early roots reggae musicians such as Lee "Scratch" Perry, Bob Marley and the Wailers, and Gregory Isaacs (Katz). The Chinese were particularly involved in music production and circulation. For example, Thomas Wong better known as "Tom The Great Sebastian" developed the first dancehall sound system in the early 50s,

and Herman Chin Loy produced, debuted and popularized Horace Swaby's recordings under the name Augustus Pablo (Goldkorn). In fact, Chinese last names can often be found on reggae records, and Jamaican reggae musicians also acknowledge the Chinese influence, as seen in Jimmy Cliff's song "Leslie Kong" (1976) dedicated to the Chinese producer, and "Dearest Beverley" (1962), a tribute to Kong's label "Beverley's." Musically, Chinese musicians also brought a distinct flavor to the reggae scene in Jamaica, exemplified by the collaboration between Justin Yap and the Skatalites on the song "Chinatown" (1964) and "Confucius" (1964), as well as the collaboration between Stephen Cheng and Byron Lee and the Dragonaires on "Always Together" (1967), a fusion between reggae and traditional Chinese love song "Maiden of Alishan" (阿里山的姑娘). However, this piece of history in Jamaica did not connect back to China until Vincent Chin's son Clive came – or returned – to China in 2009 to perform reggae and dub in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, reconnecting with the roots.

In the 1990s, carried by the international wave of reggae that popularized the genre worldwide, reggae returned to Guangdong and started to grow as a musical and cultural phenomenon in China. Musicians in Guangdong and Beijing started experimenting with reggae and dub since the late 1990s³, and reggae-themed bars and music festivals swept Guangzhou in early 21 century.⁴ However, without Jamaica's soil and the vibe of the Rastas, Chinese reggae is largely deprived from the context and the message, turning into a flat appropriation of roots reggae. Those who were involved in the scene, too, tended to capitalize on reggae for profit. Since the introduction of reggae to China, much Chinese reggae have become the wolf in sheep's cloth – they are part of the vampire-like Babylon system that reggae rebels against in the first place. It is

³The earliest reggae fusion album in China is a compilation called "Beijing Reggae" (1996), released under Hong Kong's Chinatown label. It remixes classic Mainland Chinese pop songs in a reggae style. In Guangdong, the earliest musician who experiments with reggae in the 1990s is Wang Lei, who influenced many now-famous musicians to pick up this genre.

⁴For example, Wang Lei's drummer from the 1990s, Xiao Dao, started to host reggae-themed music festivals such as the "Ersha Island French Music Fest" in 2003, opened reggae-themed bar C:Union in 2006, and plays in reggae fusion bands such as Mabang.

deceiving in the sense that reggae has reduced into empty signs and sounds used as mask and serve selfish interests.

For example, reggae where I grew up, Beijing, resembles the postcolonial aspect of reggae fusion more than the positive forces brought by cultural clashing. It is very much intertwined with popular subculture – as opposed to religious and political movements – among urban youth in the forms of signs and symbols, disconnected to the roots. Reggae elements are used as decorations integrated into a larger identity that is closely tied to some form of capital. A self-proclaimed Rasta community, T7, in the city center of Beijing, capitalizes and monopolizes on the “dreadlock” in making professional and expensive dreadlocks for customers, such as models and fitness coaches, in a small bar/hair salon. The excessive Rasta colors and pictures spray-painted on the truck outside create familiarity and a sense of cultural legitimacy, but in essence, the store is a business strategically communicated as a Rasta community (Figure 1). The public face of Chinese reggae, Long Shen Dao, demonstrates respect and understanding of the message in reggae and Rastafari to some extent, but they are largely a commercialized rock star group in the Capital. Their fame brought them onto many world news, with commentary such as “a handful of seasoned Beijing rockers-turned-dreadheads launched Longshendao (龙神道), a name as cultural as it is hippified that means ‘the Tao of the dragon god’” (Tung). The sense of irony is present and strong, which makes one wonder whether their music is genuine. In fact, their music embodies a great deal of fusion such as reggae, electronic and Chinese traditional instrumentations, and the message it brings reside primarily on sparse elements of Daoism against the background of Chinese atheism.⁵ This reflects the syncretism that happens in the international context of Beijing that fuses different musical genres together, but the product has changed extensively from roots reggae to a

⁵Chinese atheism refers to its political belief in communism, which adopts Karl Marx’ criticism against religion.

new half-reggae fusion, disjointed from the Rastafarian context and ways of practice. As much as the fusion could be celebrated for its inventive syncretism, the exploitive side should not be overlooked.

Previous relevant scholarship *Babylon East: Performing Dancehall, Roots Reggae and Rastafari in Japan* (2010) by Marvin D. Sterling depicts a similar scene in China's neighbor, Japan, where Japanese reggae is very much an appropriation in a postcolonial society.⁶ In this context, Japanese reggae musicians resemble the role of the colonizers, who exploit roots reggae and black culture for symbolic capital under a Rasta mask, creating a deceitful unequal power dynamic. Nevertheless, this is not all there is to Chinese reggae. During my 3-month fieldwork in Beijing, Guangxi and Yunnan from May to August 2015, as well as previous observations and experiences of the subject for more than seven years, I have found significant subtleties within Chinese reggae. Reggae in the less developed southwest of China, Yunnan, is less well known at home and abroad, but presents a much more special and different vibe that is comparable to Jamaican roots reggae. I will take Yunnan's influential reggae band Kawa, a 2015 music project started by Yunnan's earliest reggae and dub musicians since the 90s, as an example of Yunnan reggae. This band consists of important ex-members of other Yunnan reggae fusion bands⁷ who have spread the word about their unique and indigenous music to the public, and influenced many local youths to pick up music over drugs⁸ during the past decades.

Yunnan Reggae

⁶Sterling primarily considers the presence of voice and views from Black people in relation to Japanese as a point to evaluate Japanese reggae, and he has found that Black opinion is lacking to a large degree in the scene, and Japanese musicians capitalize on reggae for their own profit. Specifically, since Japan adopted the western way during the Meiji Restoration, structural racism has been apparent there (Sterling 27). Japanese reggae musicians exploit reggae and Rastafari to gain symbolic capital in Japan that gives them a sense of cultural legitimacy. For example, studying abroad to Jamaica (66), appropriating Jamaican language and appearance (62), and capitalizing Jamaican artists' talent and labor in making dub plates for Japanese listeners (67).

⁷The bassist Ai Yong and keyboard player Tu use to play in Shanren, and the lead singer Lao Han use to play in Si Gang Li, both Yunnan reggae fusion bands.

⁸Located near the Golden Triangle, Yunnan has a unique drug culture due to easy access. Many local youths ruined their lives using drugs such as Heroin.

A year prior to my fieldwork on Chinese reggae, I met the lead singer of Kawa, Lao Han, and his buddy Lao Hei, when they took a short trip to Beijing to investigate a record deal. Both musicians grew up in A Wa Mountain District in Yunnan, a self-autonomous region for the Wa ethnic minority in Yunnan, and later moved to relatively bigger cities in the province to “make it” in music. Now, they go back and forth to exchange what they have gained in making music with what they took from since growing up. During the first night they landed in Beijing, we, for the first time, gathered around a table outside of Studio 3, passing around a joint and chatted until midnight. Studio 3 is their fellow district man Lao San’s photo studio, located in 798, an art district in the less crowded and developed outskirts of Beijing. It is also a gathering place for other Wa people who live in Beijing.

Lao Han has darker skin tone than a regular Chinese, which is a distinct feature for Wa people. This feature makes the Wa the “Blacks” in China. His waist-long dreadlocks are thick and tight like the roots of a tree. Tattoos cover his arms. He is one of the Wa people from Lancang, a county in A Wa Mountain District, in between two great rivers⁹ that connect China with Tibet and India. When he was a kid in elementary school, he went to a small rock concert and saw Lao Hei playing, who was 17 at the time. That encounter had planted a seed in Lao Han’s heart and pushed him to follow the path of Lao Hei, eventually playing music with him.

This encounter opened doors for my subsequent multi-sited fieldwork on Chinese reggae. In July 3rd, 2015, I went to Guiyang, the capital city of Yunnan’s neighboring province, to see a concert of Lao Han’s new band, Kawa – meaning the Wa minority in Wa language – at Hulu Club, as well as their performance at Midi Music Festival two days later in the same city. As I arrived Hulu, Lao Han was standing in front of the entrance and recognized me immediately. He was about to smoke a joint with the rest of the band outside, and he invited me to join. With no plan and

⁹ Salween River and Lancang River

expectation in mind, I informally interviewed him and other band members before and after the concert, and we shared an open, friendly and natural exchange of stories and ideas. Carried by a strangely smooth chain of events, we reunited two days later at the festival, and I got invited to join their troop back to Kunming, Yunnan, on a 6-hour road trip. “If you really want to know about reggae, you need to come to Yunnan,” that was what they said to me.

My weeklong fieldwork in Yunnan begins therein. Lao Han spared me the room next to his at his home, previously inhabited by Kawa’s guitarist De Long. Behind my room is our artist suitemate Chang Xiong’s painting room (Figure 2), leading to the living room with walls covered by his artworks. Scenes in nature – especially clouds – are his favorite subjects, which are much admired by Lao Han. Across from my room in the opposite apartment suite lives Ai Yong, the bassist of Kawa, and his wife. He is well respected among the Wa and Yunnan musicians for his rich experiences in music, and his wise words and ideas. Lao Han’s next-door neighbor is whom he calls a “Rasta sistren,” Xiao Qi. Similar in age and personality, we soon became friends, spending much time together everyday (Figure 3). She is a devoted Buddhist practitioner and likes to share insights about spiritual experiences. Quiet and talented, she was helping to furnish her friend’s tattoo shop and learning to become a tattoo artist. This neighborhood is named “Tomorrow City,” residing on top of a mountain not far from down town. Many musicians, artists and subcultural youths live here amongst working people and few foreigners. A regular day usually starts at noon when band members, Xiao Qi and other friends started coming to Lao Han’s balcony surrounded by flowers and fruit trees, listening to reggae, and get ready for a shared brunch. I felt a peaceful sense of belonging created by this established community bonded by our common love for reggae, closeness to nature, and a calm and light-hearted way of communication.

The hottest days in summer are not so hot in Yunnan. It was about 60 degrees at night and in

the 80s during the day. The subtropic weather produces abundant natural resources and suits the growth of marijuana plants here. Most people smoke marijuana at Lao Han's. Sharing a long joint is a common ritual among us. This natural condition provides the right atmosphere for a chilled out pace of life and a peaceful mind, resembling a similar vibe with what roots reggae brings. The mountainous landscape and subtropic climate create geographical similarities between Yunnan and Jamaica, furthering enriching the soil for Yunnan reggae to flourish. Moreover, through conversations with Lao Han and Ai Yong, I learned the striking musical similarities between Wa ethnic music and roots reggae in rhythm, pace and instrumentation. Yunnan is very much a sister land to Jamaica in significant ways, acclimatized for a natural fusion when the two cultures meet.

On top of natural similarities, the political context of Kawa as the Wa minority in Han China draws a parallel to the Rastas in colonial Jamaica. Lao Han often talks about how Chinese totalitarian impositions destroy the Wa's home in Yunnan, such as their demolishing of traditional Wa wood houses for development toward modernity, altering Wa agriculture-based community into tourist towns, exploiting natural resources for profit, and coercing Wa to abandon their language and learn mandarin Chinese. These are much loathed by Lao Han and other Wa minorities such as Ai Yong, just like the Rastas' exposure and critique against the corrupted world brought by colonialism. For Kawa, "Babylon" is the Chinese government – trapped in the larger prison of western ways of life – compared to the British colonizers to Jamaicans. Under this condition, the emergence of roots reggae in Yunnan becomes an antidote for awakening and resistance, a readymade tool Kawa could use for change. This change, too, consists of resistance against the Chinese colonizers and a pursuit for freedom to have their own home, protect their own roots, and carry on their culture and traditions.

In fact, under China's heavy censorship and cultural restrictions, foreign subcultural music

like reggae was vacant in China's mainstream media not until recently. The only channel to listen to this music was through the illegal dakou cassettes and CDs.¹⁰ In this sense, the very act of listening to reggae, in Lao Han's generation, was a form of subversion and rebellion against China's cultural monopoly. When the message and chants against "Babylon" in reggae were received, they use it as a catalyst for a collective (r)evolution that helps them to search for and restore their own version of "Zion." This makes Yunnan reggae a continuation of the preaching and teachings of roots reggae.

Although unlike the Rastafarian interpretation of "Zion" as the Jah kingdom in Ethiopia, this heavenly home, too, is closely connected to political consequences as it is to spirituality for Kawa. Only by being free from the Chinese totalitarian regime can they regain their home in nature, which, as Lao Han told me, is the Wa's sanctuary. Their nature-based folk religion regards the tree, mountain, water and everything natural as gods that nourish the body and illuminate the soul. Traditional folk music is also made from and for nature. As much as "Zion" is reached through exodus for the Rastas, it is regained, restored and returned to for Kawa. Music is a significant impetus for this returning journey, and reggae music, in particular, is a foreign vehicle to carry on and transmit Wa roots in this generation. Ai Yong told me about the band's long-term goal of opening a school for youths to learn traditional Wa instruments with old folk artists, which seems to be the only way to continue their endangered tradition. Lao Han often takes trips back home and jams with local old folk artists, exchanging their musical knowledge by fusing Wa folk music with reggae on the spot (Video 1), bringing up the positive vibration consciously, finding a state of fusion, and subsequently revive Wa musical heritage with the One drop.

¹⁰ "Dakou," literally meaning cracked or cut out, describes the condition of leftover cassettes and CDs from overseas that were partially damaged by cutting the corner or punching a hole on the disk. Essentially foreign garbage, these produces were dumped into Mainland China during the 90s, but recycled and distributed among the people. It was an important – if not the only – vehicle at that time that brought Chinese musicians and listeners into contact with foreign music such as reggae.

In Yunnan's context, the host of reggae – Kawa – inherits and succeeds roots reggae with new interpretations. The meaning of important Rastafari motifs such as “Babylon” and “Zion” is inevitably adjusted according to contextual changes, but the essence remains largely the same. The introduction of reggae to Yunnan serves as a pill of awakening for the locals to take in the positive vibration and learn Rastafari philosophy, subsequently redeeming themselves. The natural fusion between roots reggae and traditional Yunnan ethnic folk music provides a new platform for the Yunnanese to pause their pace of development and look into the roots, relearn history, redefine their identity and revive the treasure that would be soon lost otherwise. To a large extent, minority Yunnan exists in a postcolonial condition in modernized Han China, but through inventively syncretizing with alternative foreign cultures such as reggae, Yunnanese, too, is able to sublimate their oppressive state into densely political creative expressions with new hope. Different from other parts of China, Yunnan and Jamaica's multi-faceted similarities grant the fusion of their music as symbiotic and corporative, benefiting Yunnan's condition and at the same time contributing to the international genre of reggae.

Given the length limit of this thesis, I will primarily focus on Yunnan reggae in the following two chapters. The first chapter will provide a detailed comparison of the context between Yunnan reggae and Jamaican roots reggae in music, geo-politics, religion and lifeways, based on my fieldwork with Kawa and secondary research for support. The second chapter will take specific Yunnan reggae songs for a literary analysis to clarify its message, which will shed light on the way Yunnan reggae musicians use roots reggae.

Chapter 1: Fusion In Music and Politics

Yunnan is a subtropic province in the southwest of China. It has the largest ethnic minority population, who were the indigenous people in the region for thousands of years. Today's Yunnan is China's natural resource bank and an exotic vacation destination, bordering Burma, Vietnam, and Lao. Before a destructive series of political events brought by the British colonialists and the Chinese and Burmese communist governments, Yunnan was an independent land for the natives, such as the Wa people. Each native group – an ethnic minority – has its own ways of governance and diverse cultural systems, passed down through folklore and oral tradition. Based on informal interviews with Kawa band members and secondary anthropology sources, I learned about the Wa folklore, including their music and dance, myths and beliefs, rituals and fetish. Unfortunately, many traditions were destroyed since the 1950s when Chinese and Burmese communist governments invaded the land, claiming parts of the Wa land into their own territories and enforcing assimilation. These colonial events caused detrimental effects to the Wa culture and identity. Like the Rastas, the Wa people now are a postcolonial group facing all kinds of challenges. However, although under heavy pressure to inherit its cultural heritage, there is still folklore being passed down by few older people, learned and protected by the conscious younger generation inventively. The band Kawa is among this group – cultural heroes, in a way, who work to save the roots of their culture and tradition through music – chant down the “Red Regime”¹¹ with music.

Taking Kawa as an example means to narrow down the scope of Yunnan reggae even more, only focusing on the Wa people, who are a microcosm for the “real Yunnanese” – the natives. This is the very point of connection with Jamaican roots reggae. The Wa people's folklore and their unique contemporary geo-political situation draw many parallels with the Rastas', leading to a

¹¹ “Red Regime” refers to the Chinese communist government, which uses the color red extensively as a symbol for the blood of the founding troops. This is a folk term embraced and understood by most Chinese.

natural fusion between their music and beliefs. Along this vein, I focus on a comparison between the Wa and the Rastas' music, beliefs and geo-political contexts to illustrate how this fusion brews what is known as Yunnan reggae.

Nature, Folk Music and Spirituality

The Wa people have an agrarian background¹² due to their mountainous location and natural, plant-friendly environment. According to the Wa creation myth “Si Gang Li,” men emerged from a cave, and the origin of their culture begins therein.¹³ In Taryo Obayashi’s article “Anthropogenic Myths of the Wa in Northern Indo-China,” he states how nature gives birth to the Wa people and gives rise to their myths, “Wa are variously said, in different stories, to be descended from celestial beings, frogs, and gourds” (Temple qtd. in Obayashi 43). This foreshadows the Wa people’s faith and reverence to sky, earth, water, animals and plants. Obayashi further compares different versions of the creation myth and extracts significant motifs, illustrating their connections with the agrarian background. These motifs include “the idea of a High God...well developed particularly among the grain-cultivators and pastoralists (Jensen 1960:101-102) ... a culture based on the slash-and-burn cultivation of millet or other cereals, accompanied to some extent by animalistic trains of hunting economy” (48). In this sense, nature and agriculture are the foundation to the Wa people. They are the soil that nourishes the Wa roots and produces Wa culture, largely influencing Wa life, belief, and culture.

As the Wa proverb goes, “You could talk, then you could sing; you could walk, then you could dance” (Yang 25), music and dance are deeply intertwined with Wa traditions. Like many other minorities of the region, Wa music is born out of nature, therefore, the sound and form usually

¹² According to Wa scholar at Cornell University Magnus Fiskesjo, “originally, the Wa were self-sustaining agriculturalists rotating their fields on forested mountain slopes and growing rice, millet, and many other crops” (“Introduction to Wa Studies”1).

¹³According to Stith-Thompson’s Motif Index, this motif belongs to A1232.3., originated from India.

mimic nature or people's agricultural labor.¹⁴ This feature provides a key point of connection with reggae. As Lao Han and Ai Yong told me, the backbeat used in Wa folk music imitates the rhythm of plowing the field. When a farmer swings his hoe up in the air – musically, on the omitted 1 – and hit the soil hard to plow the field – on the emphasized 2, he accidentally plays reggae just by being a farmer. In this light, the backbeat has already been part of the Wa musical tradition, making it incomparably easy to fuse with the Jamaican version. Wa music is also slow in tempo, which reflects the Wa people's simple and relaxed pace of life (Gao 95). Similarly, this slow tempo resembles reggae, a relatively slow music evolved from faster genres such as ska and rock steady. The unhurried pace emits a sense of grace and steadiness, coming from a calm mind undisturbed by Babylonian disruptions, able to deeply reflect on the simplest events in life where truth is found.

The Wa people's strong physical and spiritual tie with nature reflected in their folklore is comparable to Rastafarian tenets as well, particularly in their belief of god and spirits. The supreme god for the Wa people is Muiji (Muhidjae), the creator, believed to be a female ghost (Zhao 64). Ayiou, the ancestor to Wa males, ranks second only to Muiji (64). He is also known as the sky god, or heaven, who sees everything in the human realm and assigns karma to human deeds (Yang 6). The Wa term to express divinity is "Xi Ye Xi Yong," referring to the truthful essence of things illuminated by divine power where good will eventually outdone evil (6). I find this term most similar to "I-man," the dread talk for "Amen," so be it, which implies the balanced and just nature of life when one walks the path of faith. Although different in name, Muiji and Ayiou for the Wa people carry similar attribution with Jah to the Rastas, all pointing to the higher power that guides and watches over man, hears man's prayers, and strongly connects with man emotionally.

¹⁴In Xinrong Zhang's article "A New Discovery: Traditional 8-part Polyphonic Singing of the Hani of Yunnan," he analyzes the Hani rice-transplanting songs and realizes the pitch of these songs is an imitation of the rice-transplanting ritual in part: "We asked the singers why they like this singing style with its successive entries and leaps in pitch. The first person answered that, 'When one is out walking, each person treads his or her own path. Everybody can come together only by each leaving his or her own house.' The second said, 'When we go to the fields to transplant rice seedlings, some arrive earlier, some later; singing the transplanting songs is just like this'" (146).

Believing in spirits is another shared trait between the Wa people and the Rastas. For the Wa, ghosts and spirits are the same, and are deities from nature. Yunnan scholar Jiayu Zhou states in his article “The Wa Primordial Religion and the Transmission of Ethnic Culture,” “they [the Wa people] believe everything in nature is holy. In their worldview, humans, mountains, rivers, animals, plants and everything beyond their comprehension have spirits, therefore, everything in nature is regarded as ghosts, gods and goddesses” (67). This animistic belief contributes to their love and gratitude toward the sanctuary of nature, grants them an open mind that thinks in terms of unseen power and higher dimensions, and sets the foundation for a natural, i-tal¹⁵ lifestyle. In a way, Wa animism rings a bell with the Jamaican belief of “duppy,” a ghost or spirit that has power to possess humans. As seen in reggae songs such as “Mr. Brown” and “Duppy Conqueror,” the duppy is often regarded as a malevolent spirit. However, despite the negative connotation, this belief points to the notion of a world where spirits exist, similar to the Wa people’s worldview. In this mystical world, the physical nature of things perceived by human senses rises onto a metaphysical plane beyond human perception, but connected to spiritual insights. Therefore, the sound of a word is closely related to its vibrational power that has a real effect on reality, and music, like chants, carries ritualistic importance and magical potency. This idea extends into many living aspects for the Wa and the Rastas, serving as a guide of conduct and an instruction to art and artisanship.

It is worth noting that for the Wa, ghosts and spirits are not evil, but merely mysterious entities beyond human conception (Zhao 64), just like God. They may cause destruction to the physical world when exasperated. In fact, the term “reggae” is phonetically translated as “Lei Gui”(雷鬼) in Chinese, meaning “thunder” (Lei), or the Chinese surname Lei, and “ghost” (Gui). Lao Han

¹⁵“I-tal” is a dread-talk term derived from the English word “vital,” referring to a healthy, natural, and vegetarian diet that increases one’s vitality.

usually jokes about the genre's Chinese name, claiming reggae is a ghost surnamed Lei. When he promotes Kawa's concerts on social media, he always announces: "We are here to let out the ghosts again!" Here, reggae is used as a pun for both ghost and the music genre, demonstrating the Wa people's deeply rooted worldview. Their belief is simultaneously transcribed onto their reading of a foreign musical genre, resulting in the palpable Wa characteristics in their expression of Yunnan reggae. It also speaks for Lao Han's persona as a reggae musician as well as a messenger for Wa and Rastafarian teachings.

Example of Comparison: The Wooden Drum

The most distinguishing similarity between the Wa and the Rastas can be found in their use and worship of the wooden drum that is connected to music and dance on one hand, and ritual and spirituality on the other. In Baokang Yang's research on the Wa wooden drum, he finds clues on its origin based on three versions of a relevant folktale. The first one comes from "Si Gang Li," and the other two are collected from Wa folks. Although different in narrative, one motif remains the same: the wooden drum is made out from the image of a woman's vulvae (Yang 23-24). Visually, the approximately 2-meter long, double-headed, large tree log-like wooden drum has a groove in the middle, which is dug into the body of the drum to make sounds (Figure 4). Symbolically, as explained in the first tale, the body of the drum resembles woman's stomach (23), particularly the womb that is empty like a drum, or enlarges when pregnant. The groove on the drum is inspired by the vagina, a vertical organ connected to the inside of the body. The modal of the wooden drum reflects the Wa's historically matriarchal society (Yang 24), and also symbolizes their vulva fetish. This fetish attributes divine power to the reification of femininity as wooden drum, reflecting the Wa people-as-fetishists' object of desire: the woman as a vessel for creation, and her reproductive power that is able to prosper the Wa ethnicity, echoing Mother Earth, whom the Wa people have

much reverence.

The wooden drums, usually made out of the Red Hair Tree (Figure 5), are stored in wooden drum houses. As Wa folklore goes, in every wooden drum house there lives the grain goddess, Si Hop, who takes charge in the growth of grains (Yang 25). This further reflects the wooden drum's association with the Wa animistic feminine spirit, specifically the grain, which was read as an analogy for the motherly woman. "Grains sow, grow, come into fruition and await harvest on earth. This cyclic process has an identical nature with women's conception and reproduction generation after generation" (Wen qtd. in Yang 25). Femininity is the bridge that connects the wooden drum with the Wa's agrarian background and nature-based spirituality, drawing humanity and nature's divinity closer and closer through the wooden drum and the music and dance it brings. In the same sense, the sacredness attributed to the wooden drum is connected to god and spirits in general. As believed by the Wa people, "At times the drums are also worshipped as representations of the supreme god Muyiji (Muhidjae) ... in all cases the drum is regarded as a supernatural gift, as a deified sacred object with its grass-thatched shed as the altar to the ancestors" (Oppitz 192). This belief grants its power as god manifested, or a sacred tool to connect and channel with higher power, establishing the basis for its ritualistic function.

In comparison, the Rastafarian wooden drum, Nyabinghi drums, carry similar implications. The sacred origin of Nyabinghi drums is explained by Maureen Warner-Lewis, "The drum is closely linked in learned African philosophy with the word, in the sense in which St. John the Apostle used it at the start of his gospel – the original utterance which created life of nothingness and chaos, and then established order in that creation. The drum is therefore a divine tool of the Supreme Being, a womb or beginning of created life" (Warner-Lewis qtd. in Kahn). Here, the Nyabinghi drum resembles the Wa wooden drum on two levels. First, the drum is related to the

word of creation – the word/sound/power that lays the foundation of the vibrational nature of things. The sound of drum is therefore the original sound of the Iyaman, communicating between I and I – man and God – through the drum’s positive vibration. This corresponds with the Wa wooden drum’s channeling power. Second, the divinity of the drum is compared to “a womb or beginning of created life,” which calls forth a sense of motherhood, the sacred femininity. The association between woman, creation and the holiness of creation is a shared notion among humans across race and generation, manifested as such a worship of the womb-like drum.

Both Wa and Nyabinghi drumming ensembles consist of different parts. The Wa ensemble includes the relatively smaller “male drum” and the larger “female drum” (Qin 108). The former makes stable higher pitches, providing a high bass to ground the rhythm and to accompany the latter, which plays lower pitches in polyrhythm (108). According to the occasion, different drumbeats are used to signify different purposes (Oppitz 195), dominated by the female drum’s loud, low, and versatile voice. A Nyabinghi drum ensemble includes three parts – the bass, or thunder, funde, and repeater (Bilby qtd. in Prahlad 26). “The heartbeat rhythm of the bass drum, which sometimes sounds as if the foundations of Babylon are audibly crumbling; the tighter skin of the funde, just behind the beat of the bass, syncopating; and the higher voice of the repeater, or kete, narrating stories” (Prahlad 27). By analogy, the bass in Nyabinghi is similar to the Wa male drum in their rhythmic function that grounds the music like a pulse, or heartbeat. It also resembles the Wa female drum in their low pitch that not only audibly shakes the foundations of “Babylon,” but also mimics the deep, booming and penetrating sounds heard in the womb or in the cave, the beginning of creation. The funde’s syncopating style and the repeater’s cadenced calling are akin to the female drum’s loud voice in a flexible manner that takes control over the narrative. For both groups, singing, chanting and dancing often accompany the drumming ritual, creating *communitas*

and expressing each participant's devotion and freedom to be moved by spirit.

The functions of the Wa wooden drum and the Nyabinghi drum are also similar, primarily encompassing three aspects: communication, ritual and dance. As Qin states, “ ‘Wa wooden drum’ is first and foremost a communicative tool, hit by one person with two mallets, or him riding on the drum and hit it up and down with a wooden stick like pounding grain. The drumbeat varies based on different occasions. One kind is the alarming drumbeat, used for fire or theft alarm with a rapid rhythm, repeating from sparse to dense, strong to weak sounds” (105). This function effectively substitutes speech and delivers important messages. The sound of the drum is situational, mimicking the tone of the message with distinct drumming patterns, and arousing a certain mood associated with the situation to trigger a response. Similarly, the African heritage of the Nyabinghi drums points to the same function. Jason Kahn summarizes that the drum is used “as a speech surrogate or a ‘talking drum.’ These methods of playing were used for communicative purposes and often codes were used to be played over long distances for the sending and receiving of messages.” As the most ancient instrument, the drum speaks for a kind of human sameness, our commonality to use language in creative ways to connect with one another.

Ritualistically, the Wa wooden drum and Nyabinghi drums both play significant roles. For the Wa, wooden drum is a musical component of a larger, more complex system of ritual events. For the Rastas, Nyabinghi drum *is* the center of the ritual. However, their function remains the same: to spread positive physical or psychological change through the drum's divine power. Wa wooden drums are used in all kinds of rituals such as headhunting, cow tail cutting, building houses and praying for rain (Qin 106), which are hosted by Moba, the Wa religious leader (Zhou 71). According to Qin, the Wa people “believe the wooden drum is a sacred instrument, and the drumbeat is the signal to communicate with god. They say, ‘When we play the drum, the sky

knows we are communicating with the ghosts,' 'The ghost Muyiji will come down and be worshipped when hearing drumbeats'”(108). The drum catalyzes the manifestation of higher powers, and the drumbeat serves the large ritual purpose with appropriate accompaniment. In comparison, Nyabinghi drums are primarily used in communal ritual drumming in Jamaica. Rather than depending so much on a deity channeled through sound, the Nyabinghi drumming sound itself has power and brings healing, following the concept of word/sound/power. With a variety of pitch and rhythm, and the assistance of the holy herb, Rastas engage in a collective meditation facilitated by the vibration of sound that transforms each member's state of being.

The dancing and chanting that accompany drumming can be read as components or extension of drumming's ritualistic function. For both groups, drumming ritual helps each member to achieve a higher state of consciousness, to connect with god through praise or prayer, and subsequently transform the individual during the ritual. For example, the Wa "Pulling Wooden Drum Dance" (拉木鼓舞), explained by Yang, is a celebratory and welcoming ritual to receive the log of a deified tree in order to make the wooden drum. Under Moba's guidance, the drumming ritual starts when all men pull the tree log from the forest into their village, and all women in the village dance the traditional stomping dance to celebrate the making of the drum. According to Yang, the dance starts with all women holding hands with each other in a circle, first walking one step and stomping one time, then walking one step and kicking a leg. Then, they walk three steps and stomp one time, followed by walking three steps and kicking a leg, slowly rotating the circle (25). This simple, repetitive movement is similar to a dancing meditation when each member pays close attention to movement, mindfully listening to the drumbeat, adjusting breath and clearing the mind in music and dance. The rotating circle is an externalization of their connection with one another, and also a symbol of motion – or nature itself – the cyclic nature of things that points to

life. Although their stomping cannot be read as trodden down “Babylon” given the absence of this concept in Wa culture, it may symbolize stomping away negativity, illness, and misfortune in light of god and the spirits, similar to the idea of stomping the blues away (Murray). This non-stop drumming and dancing continue for days until the log is finally made into the drum (25). The ritual takes the members into a state of trance where everyone exists in the liminality of the deity’s arrival as the log slowly turns into the drum, and transubstantiates into a divine being. Accompanied by drum-praising and deity-welcoming chants (25), the Wa people connect with the divine and with each other in a delicate, devotional setting and set, expressing gratitude toward nature’s offering and the ecstasy of being one with the holy sound, collectively moving and moved by the spirit.

For the Rastas, as Bob Marley sings in “Jump Nyabinghi,” the dance during Nyabinghi ritual is a “dance from within” that grooves with the rhythm of positive vibration, and more importantly, symbolizes trodden down “Babylon.” Held on important occasions throughout the year, supplemented by the holy herb and reasonings in dread talk, the ritual aims to have its member “achieve higher states of spiritual consciousness (I-ya I-ights, or higher heights), deeper states of meditation, and collectively to create an enormous concentration of word/sound/power that will speed the collapse of Babylon” (Prahlad 27). In this process, the ritual purifies the ill minds brainwashed by the “Babylon,” spreading a collective healing therein (29). The drums’ ritual function, in accompaniment of dancing and chanting, once again embodies spirituality as a transcendental experience that elevates the human condition into divine illumination.

Like most artistic expressions with magical origin, drum and drumming for the Wa and the Rastas have largely evolved from sacred instrument with ritualistic use to music and performance that can be experienced in secular realms. In this generation, Wa wooden drum dance is absorbed

by the larger society and moved onto the stage, just like Nyabinghi is incorporated into reggae, facing a worldwide audience of all kinds. This is closely connected to the modern, global context that exploits regional and ethnic culture, forcing the transmutation of their nature from sacred to secular to be refashioned as marketable authenticity. On the bright side, this fluid, semi-chaotic world facilitates the exchange of historically separate cultures such as the Wa and the Rastas to make valuable, positive music in their symbiotic coexistence. The message to chant down “Babylon” does not die, but transferred to a new and broader context in a different form, inspiring those who need it more conveniently, and spreading the positive vibration in a more inclusive and inventive way.

Geopolitical context

Like the Rastas, the Wa people today have gone through oppression and trauma. They are engaging in their own forms of resistance and redemption. Relying primarily on the comprehensive historical information provided by contemporary Wa scholar Magnus Fiskesjo, this section views the Wa geopolitical context in the trajectory of its colonial history: pre-colonial period before 1950s, during colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s, and the contemporary postcolonial period. This process resembles the Rastas’ colonial history and postcolonial condition, allowing reggae’s message of freedom and cultural memory to be truthfully preserved by the Wa people to the largest extent, and be of use for a similar goal in a different context. Colonial impact on the Wa people is as heavy and harsh as on the Rastas, but they, too, respond to it with positivity and creativity as they fuse with heterogeneous inspirations. This reflects their way of resistance and survival similar to the Rastas’, and sheds light on their negotiation of borders, identities and tensions in the new world.

The Pre-colonial Period and Its Continued Tradition

Originally, the Northern Mon-Khmer-speaking Wa people lived on the mountains of Southeast Asia in between the Salween and Mekong rivers, described as the “Waic corridor” by linguist Gerard Diffloth (“Introduction to Wa studies” 1). As self-sustaining agriculturalists, the Wa people grew hill rice, millet and many other cash crops like tea, sugar cane, and opium until the recent drug ban (“Participant Intoxication” 112). Chinese sources states that Yunnan, including the Wa land, was brought under imperial Chinese control since the Qin Dynasty in 221 BC (“Introduction” 8). I remember reading about ancient Yunnanese as the “Northern Barbarians” (南蛮) in middle school, who were put on the Chinese map historically, but remained largely autonomous and were regarded as primitive and backward. In fact, the term “Kawa” for the Wa people carries a similar denigrating connotation. Fiskesjo explains, “In late imperial times (18th to 20th centuries), the Wa are explicitly referred to as ‘Kawa’ likely because the Chinese interacted with them through Shan middleman [Tai ethnic group of southeast Asia], who appended the Tai term for ‘un-enlightened’ mountain people (*kha*)” (“Introduction” 8). This etic sense of preliterate, uncivilized antiquity assigned to the Wa people by the Chinese governments throughout history lays the foundation of their later colonial impositions in the name of liberation and education.

Politically, before the 1950s, the Wa land was an independent and egalitarian region consisted of smaller communities (“Slavery” 5). Fiskesjo compares this situation to the “ordered anarchy” of the Nuer described by Evans-Pritchard (1940), where all the self-governing yet stateless communities coexist in a balance of power, uniting only in the face of external threats (5). There was no central authority, but a kinship-based system, which ruled out non kinship-based social stratifications (5). Any kind of business with outsiders was conducted on the basis of autonomy, reflecting Wa agency (5). As Fiskesjo evaluates, “the seemingly primitive but actually

sophisticated Wa themselves manipulated their difficult, yet advantageous, geopolitical situation” (5). In a way, this echoes a true democracy where everyone is equal and autonomous. Division of race and class did not exist, and power was not held in the hands of a few. This prevents much social stratification-based discrimination and injustice, facilitating the formation of a true community.

Hints of this Wa historical custom are carried over until today. On a smaller scale, the Wa land is like a neighborhood, and each smaller community is like a household. In Lao Han’s neighborhood “Tomorrow City,” friends live together as suitemates, relate to each other as brother and sister, and have regular communal gatherings. This is perhaps the closest modern community to the old times. During my one-week stay at Lao Han’s, I learned that the majority members of Kawa grew up together since childhood, literally like brothers. The first morning I woke up and walked to the balcony, Lao Han was washing clothes in two small basins, hanging his colorful pieces on an iron wire held between two branches. Ai Yong was sitting next to the table, tuning his guitar. There was leftover red bean soup in the kitchen, which was my breakfast. Everyday, there was someone in the house or coming here to cook delicious meals for everyone, and someone voluntarily doing the dishes and cleaning. Life organically follows a familial structure, built on mutual care and respect, communicated in positive ways. Economically, each person has some kind of talent to sustain him or herself, and contributes to the overall diversity of the group. The “Rasta sistren” next door is becoming a professional tattoo artist, helping at her teacher/brother’s studio and giving out free tattoos to friends. Kenan, a girl with disability living in another building, sells vintage clothing primarily to friends online. She also makes leather wallets and paints mandala, occasionally selling those at music festivals. The unique taste and good skills among this group gain itself respect, furthering connections with outsiders to do business, such as a director

from Beijing who is currently making a movie based on Lao Han with Kawa in their hometown, A Wa Mountain District. The notion and role of “leader” is absent in this group, only *facilitators* who provide gathering opportunities, absorb new members and give a hand at hard times.

The Colonial Period

The independent and resourceful Wa land was a tempting target for many colonialists. Border confrontations between the British and Chinese empires started as early as 1898 (“Introduction” 10). Although both colonial attempts failed, the Wa land was eventually subjugated in the 1960s when an international border was imposed between Burma and China, which cut through the Wa land, causing one-third of the Wa to now live in China’s Yunnan province, and two-thirds in Burma’s “Special Region 2,” better known as the “Wa state” (2). This event split the Wa people into the Chinese and Burmese sides, blocked their transportation and communication, divided ethnic unity, and imposed different systems of culture, belief and lifeway on them. Since then, the Wa people became the diaspora in a collective exile, just like the Rastas, the lost lions from the tribe of Judah after Babylonian conquest, weeping, remembering Zion by the rivers of Babylon. “Oh from the wicked, carry us away from captivity, required from us a song. How can we sing King Alpha’s song in a strange land?” (The Melodians) For the Wa people, Muiji’s song in its divine drumbeat, too, got captivated and transferred to a “strange land,” like an unborn child taken out of the womb/cave into the concrete jungle, losing touch with the alma mater, limping in “Babylon,” disoriented, dispossessed.

Borders create conflicts and chaos. Border communities such as the Wa sunk into the dangerous “peripheral situation” in the 1950s and 1960s (“Slavery” 4) as the abject, a marginalized and powerless group existing on the edge of the central, dominant order, facing inhumanity, exploitation, and discrimination. The consequences of this situation have included exploitation of

local resources, human trafficking, forced marriage with Han Chinese, and slavery (4). Wa labor migrants are much more disadvantageous compared to domestic Chinese, “often become ‘illegals’ similar to Central American migrants in the U.S.” (4). The Chinese gaze, expressed primarily in mass media, regarded the Wa people as headhunting barbarians from the poor, insect and disease-filled mountains, threatening civilization and urbanization, lagging behind China’s full-scale development, and passively waiting to be “saved.” This notion is deeply held in the minds of most Han Chinese. As I told my grandma that I would be going to Yunnan, she was very surprised, and told me that I need to be very careful, making sure to stay safe from theft, murder and disease. Her idea of Yunnan largely comes from television and newspapers that fed into either Chinese politics aiming to take over Yunnan in the rhetoric of liberating backward societies, or economics that promotes tourism to capitalize on natural resources and ethnic culture. Only by making people believe Yunnan needs to be liberated and incorporated into China, can the government legitimately take colonial actions. The derogatory stereotype toward underdeveloped Yunnan is similar to the mainstream’s discrimination against the Rastas, as described in Bunny Wailer’s “Blackheart Man.” Living like the Gypsy, many Rastas exist in the city’s fear and gossip; their ungroomed style is considered unhygienic, and their religious use of marijuana is by and large unlawful, subject to prejudice and regulation. The control and restrictions, stereotypes and solutions imposed upon them lead to assimilation, conformity and uniformity, to make them obey, accept and forget like excellent sheep following the dominant power in “Babylon.”

The Wa peripheral situation slowly evolved as the Chinese government finalizes colonization and thoroughly integrates the Wa into Chinese domination. As explained by Fiskesjo, this was achieved through China’s propagandistic ethnology that first singles out the Wa ethnicity “as an especially troublesome non-Chinese people to be surveyed according to the evolutionary scheme

adopted as the new Chinese state orthodoxy” (“Slavery” 6). Under this Darwinian notion, “societies like the Wa were ‘ancient’ relics which, unlike ‘advanced’ Chinese society, had failed to progress” (6), and the classless Wa people were labeled as “slaves” that need to be liberated (8). Falling behind in the earliest stage of evolution, the Wa primitive “Ur-Communism” faced total reconstruction to fit into China’s vision (6). This leads to the second step of colonization where Chinese ethnological assessments “help in promoting Wa society’s ‘socialist’ transformation as well as in consolidating Chinese control and furthering the long-term incorporation of the Wa into the new state” (6). In the name of help and support, the Chinese Liberation Army invaded the Wa land to “liberate” “slaves,” rebuild the land, destroy their history, and transform the Wa people. What the Wa got are Chinese-minded Wa leaders reforming their not-yet stratified social system, distinguishing first-class and second-class citizens, rebuilding Wa communities into tourist towns to make money (Figure 6), destroying drums, drum houses and rituals, eliminating superstition, and changing their language, belief, lifeways until they no longer know who they are.

This is nothing new in world history. As Bob Marley sings in “War,” “Until the philosophy which hold one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, everywhere is war.” The Rastas, too, were a group growing out of oppression and struggle after the British colonialists enslaved their ancestors and attempted to wash their minds. The Chinese and British colonialists’ perspectives and identities are different, but the destructions they bring to the natives are the same. On the contrary, the goal of the colonized is not to conform, but to resist the “Babylon.” In a 1947 interview with Wa leaders by the “Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry” set up by British colonialists with Burmese representatives, “The Wa stated their preference for total independence, and brushed off other subjects with the words, ‘We are wild people’ ” (“Introduction” 6). This statement reflects the Wa’s self-identification with their roots in

wilderness, demonstrates their rejection of modernization and defiance of control, just like the Rastas as outcasts and outlaws, chanting down “Babylon” and rebelling against “crazy baldheads.”

The Postcolonial

To a large extent, contemporary Wa people are in a pilgrimage to restore roots that have been cut off, to learn and educate their history, which is the knowledge of who they are. This is similar to the Rastafarian notion of repatriation on the exodus to Zion, which, too, is an escape from “Babylon” and a return to their roots. In other words, “at the heart of Rastafari philosophy is the matrix of cultural memory; at the core of that matrix is the memory of slavery” (Prahlad 15). Caused by colonial destruction that breaks the flow of native history, this “matrix of cultural memory” points to a sense of nostalgia, a longing for the motherland that calls for a collective recollection of the past.

Musically, the Wa wooden drum and its surrounding beliefs and practices were mostly destroyed during the 1950s and 1960s. In Qin’s 1985 research, he states that the wooden drums in Wa villages in Ximeng are all gone, and those who know how to play are difficult to trace (107). During his research, the only one old folk artist who could play found two small enamel basins with a minor third difference as a substitute for the drumming demonstration (108). Famous Yunnan dancer Liping Yang and her team recreated the wooden drum dance based on multiple ethnic traditions. She states in an interview that it took them three months to find and gather all the traditional wooden drums that survived the colonial period in villages deep in the woods. The farmers’ backbeat also got lost as China’s economic development urbanizes and systematizes the Wa agriculture-based lifestyle. Like everyone else, the Wa people now face modernized problems like finding a job, or buying a house. The cave they walked out of and took shelter from are no longer theirs, and they have reified from the Kawa people to the band of Kawa, from mountain

man to the band of mountain man (山人), playing concerts to establish a temporary Yunnan home in liminality¹⁶ and hyperconnotation¹⁷.

Changes in life also lead to changes in music and taste. In today's generation, old music like Wa folk songs were either died out, or transformed, adapted and kept growing. Under the vast variety ways of music production and consumption globalization offers, it is natural for traditional folk music to absorb new influences and syncretize with foreign elements. In 1978, China's "Reform and opening-up" policy unlocked the previously closed door between China and the rest of the world, expanded the horizon of mass media¹⁸ and prompted unforeseen phenomenon like dakou cassettes and CDs, which brought subcultural sounds to all corners of China in a subversive way. For the first time, Kawa's generation heard the chants against "Babylon" in their Babylonized hometown like receiving a gift, or weapon. As Lao Hei explains to me the indescribable feeling when he heard the first reggae song in his life, "Trenchtown Rock," he squints his eyes, lifts up his head and starts humming it, deeply immersed in music and memory. Something must have clicked in these moments when the Wa people heard reggae, perhaps a strange familiarity with their own vibe that self-evidently encouraged fusion and points to a way out for their endangered cultural heritage.

Music is intertwined with musicians' life, which is affected by the larger socio-political background. The postcolonial Wa musicians embody the transition from personal oppression and lost tradition to liberation through awakening and cultural recollection through syncretization.

Take Lao Han as an example, he used to be a police officer in his early 20s, directly experiencing

¹⁶"Liminality" refers to a stage of transition that is neither here, nor there (Turner 359), as in the temporary moment during a song.

¹⁷"Hyperconnotation" refers to a character and ability of music that triggers imagination toward its imagery, where cognitive, cultural, and emotional associations are made by the listener (Born & Hesmondhalgh 32)

¹⁸For example, Hong Kong's Phoenix TV broadcasted Bob Marley's "Could You Be Loved" in the 1990s, which made a significant influence on Guangxi reggae musician Jiang Liang. Hong Kong martial arts films such as *Kiss of Dragon* (2001) also employed reggae music as soundtrack, affecting Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese' musical taste imperceptibly.

the brainwashing training from the Chinese government. His life as a police officer clashed with his immersion and identification with subversive culture on one hand, and his Wa consciousness on the other that questions what he learns as a police. In the 2000s, he chose the road less travelled, leaving his job and initiating the exodus of a Yunnan reggae musician. He feels fortunate to have made this decision, and he treasures the freedom to pursue music. In a way, reggae was a “red pill”¹⁹ that opened his eyes from a deep dream, tore up the illusion of “happiness [as] a perpetual possession of being well deceived” (Swift), and woke him up from the government-constructed reality. He refused to be what “Babylon” wanted him to be, “pulls [his] rights from wrong” (Marley), and resisted the “devil’s philosophy” by playing “rebel music.” Now, he calls the government and those who blindly work for it as “shit eaters,” a shared term among Kawa’s members and friends. “Shit” refers to the propaganda fed by the government to its people on a daily basis, the mind-restraining ruts spread in school, at home and on mass media. Those who receive this knowledge without independent critical reflection are compared to eating shit, a satirical expression critiquing the fake nourishment imposed upon them, also read as the passive, close-minded patriots, accomplices of the “Babylon,” who perpetuate its knowledge in the name of help and correction. The term “shit eater” reflects the idea of “Babylon” for Kawa, incorporated as soft-core expressions in their version of reggae.

Besides communal living that mirrors traditional Wa lifeways, Kawa’s community also works to maximize their autonomy, to live independently in a micro pure land under the inevitable shadow of “Babylon.” The act of forming a band itself speaks for a sense of agency. A micro-community, the band is a collective effort of each member’s talent and individuality, working together to produce music that is original and unique. As an independent act free from music companies, Kawa is similar to a small intentional community, or a mom-and-pop enterprise,

¹⁹“Red pill” is a symbolic pill used in the movie *Matrix*, referring to a choice to wake up and see the brutal truth of reality.

that steps out of the restricting structure of the dominating music industry, and feeds itself through touring, playing in concerts and grassroots promotions. Currently, they are working to establish an independent label and studio in Kunming, sustaining itself in an organic, DIY-styled deal. This resembles traditional Wa economic autonomy in a modern rendition, transforming from farmers who sell crops to musicians who play “the music of the farmers.” It marks the band’s postcolonial restoration of significant Wa traits that give them the dignity to live as Yunnan reggae musicians.

Economic autonomy supports cultural autonomy. Deeply rooted in the Wa soil, Kawa’s inspiration from Wa folk music fuses with reggae incomparably smoothly, producing a reggae fusion that is difficult to imitate. This unparalleled quality can be considered as Kawa’s “core competency.” Originally a concept in management theory, it refers to the specific and special resources and skill sets of a group that distinguishes it from the rest of the competitors in the marketplace (Schilling 117). The marketplace can be compared to the grand scheme of Chinese reggae, and Yunnan reggae sets itself apart from the rest through its core competency: its unique context and transcendental way of usage, explaining itself as a natural fusion rather than appropriation. Like a triton among the minnows, having such core competency allows for a level of freedom in the sense that any trend, disruption or control from China’s mainland reggae scene cannot sway Yunnan reggae’s pursuit. It is freed from those noises, and free to advance itself in its own direction. Although still under Chinese government’s censorship, having as much economic and cultural autonomy provides freedom of speech to the largest degree, and this is the power that frees minds and spreads change.

Kawa’s members also adopt roots reggae musicians’ personas without consciously advocating it. Their personas, primarily, are the messenger, priest and warrior of their belief. Explained by Prahlad, “Artists such as Bob Marley ... saw themselves, and were perceived by Jamaican and

international audiences, principally as messengers of Rastafari. The role of messenger was taken to another level, however, by most of these artists who, in keeping with Rastafari philosophy, viewed themselves as prophets and priests” (33). For Kawa, the message of Rastafari is combined with the message of the Wa, delivered to native, mainland and international audiences through music in its positive vibration, and lyrics in both Wa language and Han Chinese. The personas of prophets and priests are comparable to the traditional Wa spiritual leader, Moba, the host of rituals, medium between man and god, and priest that guides Wa spiritual practices (Zhou 70). Although this figure is no longer present in secular China, members of Kawa reinterprets this role, moves traditional sacred practices such as drumming and chanting onto the stage, and recreates an ecstatic yet serene communitas in concerts similar to that during rituals in old times. Moreover, “with the combined influences of liberation movements at home and abroad the priest became merged with the ‘warrior,’ resulting in a warrior/priest persona that dominates roots reggae lyrics” (33). The warrior guards their cultural tradition, fights against “shit eaters” or “Babylon,” and strives toward freedom and liberation. In comparison, Kawa’s members take on the priest/warrior person as folk cultural heroes not only on stage, but also in regular conversations with friends and on social media. The most recent article Lao Han shared on WeChat²⁰ is Chinese independent writer Chunhe Zuo’s satire “I’d Rather Salute To A Ferocious Prostitute, Than Aiding A Breathlessly Vital Literati,” the “Babylon,” natural sceneries in A Wa Mountain District, and Buddhist spiritual teachings are the main subjects of Lao Han’s frequent posts, raising awareness toward Wa culture in an easygoing way, drawing attention to the troubles in the world without being a serious poker face, and influencing his friends imperceptibly, like constant dropping wearing away the stone.

²⁰WeChat is a widely used Chinese SNS App.

Chapter 2: Yunnan Reggae In Two Movements

This chapter takes two songs of Kawa, “Red Hair Tree” (红毛树) and “Nursery Rhyme” (童谣), as examples for analysis on the music and politics of Yunnan reggae. Both songs deal with a fundamental aspect of human life: working. The first song is a work song chanted during the Pulling Wooden Drum Ritual, which involves a series of labor performed to make the Wa wooden drum. In this song, the Wa people work for themselves, and make sense of labor on their own terms. Working is a pure subject without the reference to whom they work for. This characteristic allows the song to reflect working itself, and express its sublimity and spirituality through music, which provides points of connection with reggae on musical and ideological levels. The second song is Kawa’s after-thought about working, explained through proverbs and a nursery rhyme. It centers on working for others, which implies a power dynamic similar to the Rastas’ relations to the colonialists. It also resolves this unequal exchange of power by changing the mode of working back to the workers/musicians themselves, further exemplifying the politics of autonomy and the movement toward freedom behind and inside the music, comparable to reggae’s context. As a universal phenomenon, working is a common human experience across time and cultures; it can be used as a universal motif for comparison in different types of reggae internationally. Moreover, as a spectrum that involves different degrees of labor, working is a highly elastic motif that covers a wide range of issues relatable to both the Wa and the Rastas, drawing closer connections between their two types of reggae.

To provide a comprehensive analysis, I will organize my discussion by first introducing the background of each song, then examining three interconnected aspects of the music: the instrumentation, the form, and its sound and tone. This is supplemented by a lyrical analysis in

relation to the music and the rhetorical situation, as well as a comparison with reggae.

Movement I: Reincarnation of the Red Hair Tree through Human Labor

If you have chatted with the elders on the A Wa Mountains about this land, you will see an extraordinary beam of light glistening in their eyes, carrying endless assurance and reverence. “Red Hair Tree” is something they will definitely speak of. This kind of tree is the most ordinary beings in their lives when they were young. The Wa ancestors believe, where there is the red hair tree, there is god’s blessing. Therefore, in the past, the tall and robust red hair trees surrounded all Wa villages (Figure 7&8).

This is a passage about the eponymous song written by Little Seven, Ai Yong’s wife, on Kawa’s official WeChat page. It explains the red hair tree’s spiritual and cultural significance among the Wa people throughout history, sophisticatedly connected to the Wa wooden drum and its surrounding rituals. In fact, Lao Hei’s previous band was also named “Red Hair Tree,” a name reflecting the central status of the tree as a key cultural symbol and a constant reminder of their roots. In the Wa cultural context, the red hair tree is a liminal being that crosses over into multiple categories. It stands for nature, which carries divine power according to Wa animism. It is also a chosen plant to be made into the Wa wooden drum, an embodiment of the Wa deity, used as a ritual object. In this sense, the red hair tree shape-shifts from a plant to an instrument completed by human labor and a delicate system of rituals, through which it becomes a missing link between the sacred and the mundane, between Wa animist spirituality and its reification as the drum, and between the mystical nature and human’s attempt to communicate with it.

According to *World Agroforestry Database*, the red hair tree, properly known as *Schima Wallichii*, is an evergreen belonging to the tea tree family, found throughout Indochina. The cylindrical bole grows 10-20 meters tall by about 5 meters wide, reaching up to 47 meters with branches (“*Schima Wallichii*”). Small, fragrant white flowers cluster at the top of twigs, surrounded by the leathery, green elliptic leaves. However, new leaves and flower buds come in delicate shiny red like newly grown hair (McNamara), which most likely prompted its Yunnanese

folk name as the “red hair tree.” The tree is bestowed with special significance only among the Wa people, who use the trunk exclusively to make the wooden drum. For other groups, the tree’s strong wood makes durable fodder and firewood (“Schima Wallichii”), and other parts carry medicinal value.²¹

In today’s context, the number of the red hair tree in Yunnan decreases drastically during colonial destruction. They are no longer used to make drums in the hands of the exploiter, and the wooden drums they became were destroyed. However, the spirit of the red hair tree that constitutes Wa culture and history is not dead. The tree turns into the song of the tree where the spirit lives on behind each instrument and inside of each musician. Orchestrated through music, the spirit of the tree resurrects on the stage, communicating Wa history and wisdom from the long-lost forest in a voice inspired by the Rastas. The mediums of communication, or the Moba – in this case, Kawa – turn into reggae musicians/priests/warriors, adapting to change by renewing the labor and magic put into the Pulling Wooden Drum Ritual into a contemporary art form. The dancing Wa women villagers during the ritual turn into the dancing audiences during the concert, sharing *communitas*. In this atmosphere, the concert carries ritual-like quality. It facilitates people achieving a higher state of being beyond material limitation, and overcoming the absence of a traditional ritual format to embrace a new, fusal construct. When the song of the red hair tree starts to play and the vibes begin to spread, the spirit of the tree manifests without the presence of the tree, teleporting people back in time to the ritual occasion. The musician and listener – the Moba and worshippers – “know without going, name without seeing, complete without striving” (Lao Tzu, Ch. 47).

There are six people in the band. On a large stage as in music festivals, four to five people

²¹The Nepalese use the leaves and roots for fevers, and sometimes use the bark to treat intestinal worms (McNamara). The astringent corollas are also used for uterine disorders and hysteria (“Schima Wallichii”).

usually stand in a row side-by-side, facing the audience. The lead singer Lao Han stands in the center, playing the rhythmic guitar in slightly exaggerated gestures. On his right stands the bassist Ai Yong, the wise adviser of the band who always rocks his body gently, giving off a sense of serenity. De Long stands on the far right, playing either the melodic guitar or the sampler, highly concentrated. On the left side, Lao Hei carries his guitar and spreads out his colorful synthesizers on the ground, while handling his computer on a small table for dub effects. Tu stands on the far right, playing the keyboard and a small collection of flutes. The drummer sits at the back, playing the regular drum set. There are times when Lao Hei leaves the band for work or family, and the five-person band adjusts their music accordingly, particularly in the parts of Lao Hei's specialty, dub production. On smaller stages as in Hulu Club, De Long and Tu usually move back a few steps, giving room for Lao Han and Ai Yong at the front. Without much literal communication on stage, the band members tacitly coordinate in harmony and ease.

The live-recorded version of this song I use for analysis was performed on April 13, 2016, in Xi Shuang Ban Na, Yunnan, the day of the Dai New Year of 1738, celebrated with the 3-day Water Festival and live concert (Video 1). Thousands of people come to the New Year celebration at Gao Zhuang Xi Shuang Jing, a 198-acre tourist area in the city, adjoining to the Mekong River and the Jinghong Pagoda. Located at the Pagoda Square, the concert stage erects above ground level, with large, club concert speakers on both sides, LED lighting on the top, and the sponsor logo "Tuborg" on the background. The standing crowd swarms the square, some waving their arms, some cheering exuberantly.

It was around sunset when Kawa starts to perform. With a short opening struck on the snare drum, and a long, high note played by the sampler at the background, Lao Han greets the audience and begins the first song. He dedicates it to "the never-ending rubber forest," the special local

product of Xi Shuang Ban Na. Once again, Kawa emphasizes Yunnan as a resourceful land with abundance for self-sufficiency and sustainability. This line can also be taken as an invocation to nature that calls for divine presence and sets the tone for the following ritual. As Lao Han makes the dedication, the synthesizer plays a distant, fleeting and whirly high pitch, as if painting an audio picture of the rubber forest rocking in the wind. The guitar comes in with a simple, somber tune in minors that climbs up and down in the scale like an opening call-and-response, initiating the ritual. This tune repeats two times until the drum kicks in with a stable rock beat, providing the pulse, followed by the flute playing a folk ballad, and the bass dropping the deep and subtle reggae rhythm. At this moment, the song starts to form a distinct reggae style that slowly moves the body of each musician, while preserving a unique Wa music impression with the keyboard's dominating Wa folk melody. Bonded by the one-drop rhythm, the layered sounds continue for a few nodules and then retreat back to the guitar's minor tune combined with the synth's whirly effects, offering a space to breath and to prepare.

This bridge leads into the first part of the song that includes the only two verses of lyrics, sang in Han Chinese. Three lines of unmeaning chanting of the *hao zi*, or work song, follow each verse as one stanza. The lyrics read:

Such a huge red hair tree (好大一棵红毛树)

Hitting the wooden drum sounding dong dong (敲起木鼓呐咚咚响)

Loud and clear, the lyrics selectively emphasize the two core features of the red hair tree. It is, first and foremost, a tree that embodies nature's work as a divine model. It is also a huge tree, aesthetically admirable, and generous in offering its wooden body and healing leaves. Such tree is chosen by the Wa to be made into their most sacred instrument, the Wa wooden drum. As the second line states straightforwardly, the tree has transformed into the drum, reincarnated as Muyiji,

fulfilling its resurrected destiny in Wa culture. This line also gives the drum sounds, movements, and vibration. Someone – perhaps the Moba – is hitting the drum, calling for divine presence and rallying the spirits of the community. The drum answers naturally – “dong dong” – described as onomatopoeia in the lyrics, imitating the ritual drumming while triggering imagination in the most palpable and effective way. Although seemingly crude, the two lines of lyrics go right into the heart of the matter powerfully. Soon, the guitar repeats the melody from the intro and provides another break, leading the song into the main part where Lao Han, Ai Yong and De Long start to chant the full version of the Wa work song, *hao zi*.

The *hao zi* suggest the significant medium of the tree’s transformation: human labor, including sawing down the tree, pulling the trunk from the forest to the village, and making it into the drum (Figure 9). In the main part of the song, the *hao zi* is chanted in a low key, in a simple melody that repeats D and G rhythmically. The percussion is the most distinct instrument during the chant. The drum set sparks a muscular and vigorous vibe, while grounds the flow for an anchored, earthy base. The guitar and the bass play the backbeat that matches with the cadence of the *hao zi*. Without literal meaning, the chanting follows a rhythm that imitates the sawing of the tree and the movements of the workers, which sounds remarkably reggae. The light upbeat corresponds with the worker’s motion as he bends his back and pushes the saw up into the wood, and the strong downbeat draws a parallel to the harsh pulling of the saw to cut the wood. Each syllable of the *hao zi* matches with a beat, placing emphasis on the even-numbered syllables to accentuate the downbeat, the pulling of the saw. Together, they constitute reggae’s adagio, steady and blunt two-part rhythm.

However, it was just the work song feature that draws slight differences with reggae, primarily in the tone. When the three men chant the *hao zi* in a simple, straightforward, and forceful way, the

song echoes a call for action or a rallying cry more than the melodious and undulating singing in reggae. Moreover, as the *hao zi* goes on, the drummer hits the bass drum during the downbeats, and the snare drum during the backbeats, building up a sturdy, harsh, and calloused tone, impersonating the energy and effort put into sawing. The crash cymbal's loud and sharp sound spreads in between beats with an occasional pounding on the double bass pedal, reinforcing the emphatic and exertive ambiance during labor. This is unlike reggae's relatively relaxed style of drumming in its dance-inducing one-drop, and the lively, playful steppers.

The *hao zi* carries many similar attributions with work songs of other traditions. It grows out of the context of human labor, a shared human condition since the beginning of time, and represents it in an artistic way. Siegfried Nadel and Theodore Baker believe work song is the origin of music, because it sings about what created music: human activity. They write,

In concerted rhythmical labor there arise spontaneously certain rhythmical bursts of sound that apparently tend to facilitate the task; they develop into the characteristic work-calls, as they may be heard wherever concerted labor is going on ... these calls lead to the formation of intervals and motives, developing into characteristic work-songs [such as the seamen's chanties], which we are to accept as the earliest, original musical creations of man" (536).

As one of the "the characteristic work-calls" that facilitates the sawing of the tree, the *hao zi*'s "rhythmical bursts of sound" imitate the pace of the working action, its texture and intensity. This imitation not only exhibits the work song's distinct impression, but also provides room for the worker/singer to add artistic rendition that makes sense of labor on its own term. In fact, imitation is a shared feature of work songs across the world. Stated in his article "Negro Folk Expression: Spirituals, Seculars, Ballads and Work Songs," Sterling Brown points out a similar phenomenon in African American's *hao zi*, exemplified by the railroad work song "This Old Hammer": "More widely spread and known are the Negro work songs whose rhythm is timed with the swing back and down and the blow of broad-axe, pick, hammer, or tamper. The short lines are punctuated by a

grunt as the axe bites into the wood, or the hammer finds the spike-head” (57). Just like the *Wa hao zi*, matching rhythm and lyrics with certain working action is a distinct way to imitate work with music. As the swing back and down turns into the timed rhythm, or the two-part movement during the sawing of the tree turns into the up and down beats, practical actions of work transfer into symbols of work through the artistic language of music. In this sense, work song’s imitative quality marks its attempt to translate or transcribe experience into expression, life into art. It comes from the working experience, yet condenses it into a hyperconnotative representation that reflects real life while invites further imagination and interpretation. As a cross-cultural phenomenon, imitative work songs also indicate human’s basic ability and desire to refine perceptions and experiences, and to create a more ideal version of reality in music and art.

Across traditions, many work songs are also spiritual in nature. This spirituality intertwined with music can be read as an antidote to the pain of labor, and a medium that transforms labor into ritual. Despite the sense of accomplishment labor brings, it is a human predicament. In its extreme form stand slavery, an exploitation and abuse of labor. In early human communities such as the Wa, labor in the field defines the nature of their agriculture-based society. More broadly, everyone needs to work in some form to produce and to survive. However, this predicament eases through music, spiritual music, which sublimates the pain of labor into songs and prayers that spread cheer and speak transcendence, as seen in blues and the Negro Spirituals. For the *Wa hao zi*, spirituality lies not so much in the lyrics’ literal meaning as it is in the lack of literal meaning. This unmeaningness gives the work song a mantra-like quality where the chant is repeated with concentration and matching action, focusing the workers’ minds and feeding force to the task. Under this effect, the task of sawing the tree is no longer an exhausting chore, but an opportunity for spiritual empowerment and purification.

The force employed in chanting of the *hao zi* creates a vigorous tone, which resembles the *kiai* used in Japanese martial arts. *Kiai* refers to the short, loud yell as a fighter performs an attack. Without literal meaning, the yell expresses the fighter's strength and attitude, which in turn galvanizes his action. Louis Frederic explains the *kiai*'s effect in his *Dictionary of the Martial Arts*, "[It] enables a person carrying out a violent movement to purify his mind of extraneous thoughts, leaving simply the pure energy (*ki*) which causes him to act, and confers upon him all its intensity" (Frederic qtd. in Wilson 3). Comparably, the sawing of the tree carries a similar level of violence and intensity. During this act, chanting the *kiai*-like *hao zi* punctuates the worker's breath that suits his physical exertion, through which he clears his mind and gathers his energy. Hence, the labor of sawing resembles the training in martial arts, as the force fed into the action is guided by the tone of the *hao zi* with coherency and strength. Coherency creates a smooth flow of movements when the body acts with no hesitancy, being one with the mind and the spirit. Strength uplifts the one's vibration while bolsters the intention set for the labor, and to the tree. Collectively chanted, the *hao zi* creates a harmonic and cohesive tonality that facilitates a communal working meditation, transforming labor into ritual by forming a collective conscious among the Wa workers, and converting their states of being therein. Similarly, the red hair tree transforms from its pre-liminal tree-body to the post-liminal drum-body in ritualized labor, completing a rite of passage to becoming an embodiment of the Wa deity through the ritualistic chant of the *hao zi*.

Work song in Jamaica is also functional music. As it is put in the Afro-Jamaican philosophical context of word/sound/power, work song, just like other types of song such as reggae, inevitably carries spiritual implications. In *Jamaica's Folk Music*, Olive Lewin discusses five categories of Jamaican music – Ritual, Ceremonial, Social, Functional and Entertainment – and their relations to traditional African philosophy. Work song belongs to the fourth category, emerged primarily out of

the slaves' need to communicate (19). Lewin states, "These chants took on the rhythm of the task to which they were attached, helped to lighten their labor and make the work go better ... most of the songs have been used for agricultural labor, and are antiphonal, with the leader often improvising topical words which the work gang replies with a chorus, which may be as short as two words" (19). Here, Jamaican work song draws similarities with the *Wa hao zi* on several levels. They are both imitative, and used to facilitate labor, or alleviate pain. Structurally, the leader who calls an "improvising topical words" matches with Lao Han the bandleader's singing of the bare lyrics of "Red Hair Tree," and the chorus replied by the work gang corresponds with the collective chanting of the *hao zi* that follows the lyrics. The fact that the chorus "may be as short as two words" speaks of its utilitarian function during labor, when the short or mantra-like chant not only refrains the distraction of singing, but also fuels working in its beats and tone.

Rooted in African philosophy, Jamaican music, too, links sound with vibrational power that affects reality. Fela Sowande describes, "[Sound is] a metaphysical agent, potent in its own right, and as itself a creative force, which operates effectively according to the laws of its own nature, with or without the awareness or consent or approval of Man" (Sowande qtd. in Lewin 17). This understanding of sound is most similar to the Buddhist teaching on mantra, "a sacred utterance that is considered to possess mystical or spiritual efficacy" ("Mantra"). For both principles, sound overrides literal meaning, transcends physical limitations, and functions independently. Lewin explains the role of sound as one of the "three psychological verities which are major factors in the attempt to establish and maintain an ideal state between all the levels of society with its four worlds: 1. The major Gods and Goddesses; 2. Ancestors and Heroes; 3. Humans – the departed, the living and those of the next generation; and 4. The world of Nature and of the Elemental Spirits" (16). In this sense, sound connects man with man on this dimension, and man with god, ancestors,

and spirits on another dimension. Under this framework, the sound employed in Jamaican work song is a sacred instrument that influences the working environment and experience. It joins the worker's body and spirit, bonds the work group, and develops a sense of community where the workers find emotional comfort amidst slavery. It also provides a channel to yoke with the cosmos, where the workers find psychological refuge and hope.

Both Wa and Jamaican work songs point to a process of sublimation, which is a key point of connection with reggae. On the basic level, work song sublimates labor into music through an artistic imitation of the task, which in effect relieves the pain of labor. As discussed in "Introduction," reggae follows this elevated mode of life by sublimating oppression in the Babylon into a pursuit to Zion through music, which spreads the message and power of political resistance and self-redemption. As oppose to work song, reggae can be considered as post-work song that mindfully reflects on working – or better, over-working – in its extreme, inhumane form: physical and mental slavery. Just like how work song therapeutically eases working, reggae also eases and heals the collective traumatic memory of slavery, and precipitates lessons of wisdom from the pain of oppression like alchemy. On the ideological level, work song transforms functional music into spiritual chants, following the ideology of word/sound/power. This subsequently endows work song with spiritual potency, and labor with ritualistic significance. Similarly, reggae's emphasis on the positive vibration of the one-drop rhythm and the Iyaric converts song into prayer and chant, lifts up one's state of being, and facilitates a meditation on the metaphysical nature of existence, the spiritual mode of living.

Movement II: Return To Innocence: From Nature To City And Back Again

On July 9th, 2015, the fourth day of my fieldwork at Lao Han's neighborhood, Ai Yong made

contact with Yunnan People's Radio and took the band to the radio station for an interview (Figure 10). I tagged along, sat on the curb in the studio, and recorded the interview, which involved important questions regarding the implication of Kawa's fusional genre. This formal interview became my key point of reference on the band's story and goals, tying my scattered, mostly spontaneous conversations with different band members together in a constructed way.

The song "Nursery Rhyme" was brought up during this interview, when Ai Yong articulated his vision of Kawa based on the lessons he learned from his 13-year experience playing for a famous Yunnan ethnic fusion band, Shanren, in Beijing. Along with conversations about the musicians' striving, Kawa's keyboard Tu recommended the radio host to play this song, a simple and soft tune that summarizes a rustic countryman's diasporic struggle in a big city, using nursery rhymes and a combination of proverbs that speak the wisdom of the folks. The song's form and lyrics are representative of a personal transformation that moves from an old Yunnan self to a dream chaser outside of Yunnan, and then returns to the homeland with qualitative changes, forming a new self. These personal typological stages correspond with the Wa and the Rastas' colonial history on a broader scale, telling a personal history that is intertwined with ethnic history. This song follows this thread, shedding light on Kawa's context and musical decisions.

Like a gentle breeze, the 3-minute song starts with the guitar playing a smooth, elementary theme melody with delayed effects, as if imitating a mother's gentle caress on a child. Light drumbeat begins in dub rhythm after the intro, combined with the keyboard's repeating theme melody in a tinkling, toy-like timbre. Rocking in a slow, calming beat, Lao Han starts to sing the first verse:

Dotted nest, wormy nest (点点窝 , 虫虫窝)

Mouse comes to make nest(老鼠来做窝)

Dotted nest, wormy nest (点点窝 , 虫虫窝)

Little bird comes to make nest(小雀来做窝)

Adapted from a traditional nursery rhyme, this verse recreates the innocent sound of childhood. It is about animals building nests, which locates the child rhyme in the context of nature, the Wa sanctuary. The types of animal used in this song are light, miniature creatures, ringing a bell with the everyday man residing in the countryside who has little power to change the course of life and the world around him. This notion also relates to the general Wa population who had little voice and power during colonial expansion and assimilation. However, these animals work to build nests and establish homes, done to a sophisticated degree, as seen in the well-formed holes made by a mouse, or the delicate bird's nest on the tree. Although relatively weak in the natural world, these animals try to make the best out of the environment with effort and devotion. They also have the skills to be resourceful, to take advantage of external forces in favor of survival. This draws a comparison to the Wa people who have built their nests amidst numerous obstacles throughout history. In this light, this verse captures a spirit passed down from mother to child that guides one's life in the wind of change.

For the Wa people, this is their root in nature that taught them life. Most band members of Kawa grew up together in the same village in the 70s during the Wa postcolonial period, when their nests just begun to change from traditional Wa wood houses to western-style apartment complexes. Compared to city people, they are much closer to nature. As Lao Han comments, "Living environment is very important ... a natural environment have taught us something that can be applied congruently in music." A childhood in nature grants these Wa musicians open minds, and wild, organic musical intuitions. Lao Han further compares nature and cities' influence on music: "it is hard to have music of freedom in cities, because there is no freedom in cities. We play reggae because we are nurtured by nature. Mother gave us life, and nature gave us all the memories

of life since growing up.” This statement once again connects nature with maternity. Nature’s sounds, nourishing Lao Han and his friends’ childhoods, is Mother Earth’s nursery rhyme that bestows them with candor, ease, and freedom, sublime qualities shared by reggae.

The term “nest” also points to home, a place of origin with a sense of belonging. As the lyrics imply, home is the center of life that provides direction and meaning to labor. The value of home does not lie in a grandiose form, but in its unparalleled comfort that brews deep emotional attachment. On a broader level, the nest may also refer to the figurative home of the Wa motherland that gives its children roots and identity. Along this vein, the first verse of this song states the theme of a home rooted in nature, experienced by an innocent child unaffected by the city, or the “Babylon.” It sings about the old self, growing in the mother’s embrace, when life says, “Don’t worry about a thing ‘cause every little thing gonna be alright” (Marley).

Repeated four times, the first verse leads straight into the second, which takes a lyrical turn:

The frog in the bottom of the well wants to climb up (井底青蛙想出头)

Caused harm to himself and his mother (害了自己害了娘)

The frog in the bottom of the well wants to climb up (井底青蛙想出头)

Sold his wife and sold his house (卖了媳妇卖了房)

This verse embodies the development of the old self, moving away from the nest to seek a different life – becoming the diaspora. Taken from a Chinese proverb, the frog in the bottom of the well is a metaphor to an everyday countryman living in a limited environment with a limited vision. This is connected to the child from the first verse, who grew up in the mountains, away from the seemingly advanced outside world. However, the frog is not content with this environment, and he desires to “climb up.” This act refers to getting out of the comfort zone, home, and moving to a higher position, higher status. Connecting this notion to the experiences of Kawa’s band members, Ai Yong and Tu, two “frogs,” left Yunnan for Beijing more than 10 years ago for better musical

opportunities. Ai Yong played for Shanren and accomplished their North America tour in 2012, while Tu left the band 7 years ago, became a DJ and opened a bar. They had settled in the “Babylon,” reaching closer and closer to the dream that prompted their action, which, for many other “frogs,” could be the end goal.

Nevertheless, this movement is depicted in a negative light. It “caused harm to himself and his mother” because the concrete jungle outside of home is unnatural, exclusive, and uncomfortable. The music in big cities is also different from the music of nature. As Ai Yong reflects on his experience in Beijing, “In the beginning we were searching, we were losing stuff. It was all learning, like I have to be metal (laugh).” The searching refers to a stage of fumbling, when he gropes his way into the city’s formula of music and life that is often tied to money and fame. As he slowly conforms to the city’s taste and reaches the high point of his dream, he also loses the way back home, deviated from the roots that took him there and defined his original identity. Every time, Ai Yong speaks of his rough past in Beijing with a rueful smile. The busy life of a young, independent musician who creates, rehearses and performs extensively was difficult to adapt, especially when time and energy were spent on the business side of music among “shit eaters.” Much like selling the soul to the devil, the city capitalizes on ethnicity, natural music, and candid spirits, measuring invaluable qualities with price and labels. As the last line depicts, the frog eventually “sells his house,” referring to the literal act during a hard time, as well as to franchising Wa roots for profit out of context, and consuming away tradition and memory for an arbitrary meaning defined by the “Babylon.” It signifies the wandering frog’s homelessness in a technocapital urban complex, floating around with no grounding.

This experience is comparable to Bob Marley’s “Rat Race” and his period of working as a welding apprentice in a steel mill at age 14 (Moskowitz 7). Consuming life in an exhausting and

competitive routine, this job, like Ai Yong's densely organized for-profit concerts, is the daily struggle of a ghetto youth, or a "frog." These hard-working, oppressed workers are compared to a "rat race," waged laborers who run on an ever-accelerating treadmill under the control and patrol of the "cats," or the "shit eaters," pointlessly pursuing a dollar bill. In the song, Marley sings, "Don't forget your history / Know your destiny / In the abundance of water / The fool is thirsty" (22-25). "History" refers to the center of the Rastas' cultural memory: slavery. Once one is fully aware of this history and its implications, it is logical to resist against and move above it, living a different kind of life other than that of the rat race. This consciousness leads to knowing the "destiny," a future freed from slavery, and guided by the voice in the heart. For Marley, his love of music provides a cue to know his destiny, and he took an active role in it when he suffered an eye injury in the steel mill, which led to his leaving of the job and fully embracing the life of a musician (Henke 11). His moment of realization and choice diverted his route of life, presented him with a new world, a new "abundance of water." Here, water can be read as an enlightened perspective on life that "emancipates [him] from mental slavery" (Marley), which subsequently opens to new opportunities, new abundances. As Michael Keulker points out in his commentary "Bob Marley in Light of the Proverbs," water is often related to wisdom. "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water" (Proverb 20:5 qtd. in Keulker), one's innate knowledge – wisdom – nourishes his heart in stillness, and flows into a naturally appropriate direction that navigates his life. "A man of understanding will draw it out" (Proverb 20:5); he will listen to the voice in his heart, be guided by it, and walk on the path of destiny. Whereas a fool ignores his own wisdom, blinds his eye from history, covers his ear from inner voice, walking in confusion and frustration like a thirsty zombie.

For the child in the song, as much as his city experience wipes away innocence, it also refines him and his skills. City life broadens his horizon, provides him with a new variety of music to

experiment with, eventually leading to a solution of fusion. Fusion represents a reconciliation of multiple voices and perspectives that leads to the final union of similarities, and the delicate negotiation of differences, through music. This is inventive syncretism. In this light, climbing out of the well into the city marks a necessary digression from the original point to absorb new knowledge, to be inspired by discordances and shocks, which allows for realization and return. The pain suffered in this experience, much like Marley's eye injury in the steel mill, becomes lessons of life and opportunities for change. It is a *felix culpa*, a needed, fortunate fall in order to stand up and get on the right path again with more certainty.

Lead by the hand drum's brief bridge, the final verse repeats the first one, completing the song in a ternary form. Like a circle that starts from alpha and returns to alpha, this form implies restoration, recovery and rediscovery, as "what goes around comes around." It also puts an end to the search and wandering of the old self as he fulfills the cyclic nature of things with a new state of consciousness. If the first verse is an innocent calling, the final verse is redemption and healing, achieved through the choice of return. Figuratively, it symbolizes each band member's decision to come back home, to reform the long-lost community and make Yunnan reggae. The fundamental reason for this choice, using Sun Tzu's idea from *The Art of War*, may be rooted in an alignment of the right time (天时), right place(地利), and right people (人和). The right time refers to a suitable generation that provides the necessary social premises and opportunities to achieve the goal – the will of the heaven. Ai Yong explains this concept during the radio interview when the host asks whether Kawa has thought about the commercial value of their music, to which he replies:

As long as you have the right attitude, commercial value is everywhere, because it is not decided by us, but by the market. Follow your heart and make sincere music. If the sincere music is gold, it will be found sooner or later. Also, I think the most important factor is that the channel [of commercialization] is different now ... I have walked the old path; going to Beijing, playing contracted shows...(laugh).

The new channel of commercialization is a product of this generation closely tied to new forms of communication. The Internet, communicating translocationally, spreads music freely and connects people through virtual reality. Kawa's audio recordings can now be found on numerous Chinese websites that provide online advertising and social networking opportunities for musicians, and their videos recordings are published on multiple Chinese video-sharing websites.

For example, "Douban," a SNS cultural community found in 2005 for fans of music, movies and books, is considered as the top platform for independent musicians and music fans by the young generation. It has an estimated 53-million registered users in 2011, with 90% users as white-collar workers or college students around the world, 70% coming from first-tier cities and 80% aging between 21-36 ("Douban: China's Culturally Focused SNS"). This demographic of globalized, well-educated youth is more open-minded to diverse perspectives and experiences, willing to discover and appreciate subcultural sounds and views independently. Further, the website developed a "Douban Musician" feature that allows musicians to establish their own webpages within the site, on which they could upload their works and posting information about their concerts (Figure 11). Developing a fan base, spreading the word, and organizing people are made much easier on this online community.

Moreover, "Douban" also changed the Chinese online cultural atmosphere to be more tolerable and inclusive, which grants independent musicians newfound freedom. In Tianqi Yu and Luke Vulpiani's *China's iGeneration*, researchers point out that the style and genre of "Douban" is revolutionary (306). Style wise, "Douban" prompted a " 'new sensibility towards power and authority,' in which 'mockery and satire' play a prominent part" (Yang qtd. in Yu & Vulpiani 306), which is contrary to the traditional, "sometimes epic style of contention of protest movements in China's past, and a residual tendency towards 'emperor-worship' (that is, pinning hopes for reform

onto strong leaders)” (Yu & Vulpiani 306). This feature allows politically conscious musicians such as Kawa to find a solid channel of music dissemination. This channel facilitates their cultural survival and political manifesto, as oppose to banning for their outspoken progressivism as in many other platforms, particularly before the 21st century. Correlatively, the genre of “Douban” reveals to have a “ ‘flourishing of diverse speech genres,’ which in itself constitutes a ‘challenge to power,’ given that ‘political authorities everywhere tend to employ a narrower range of speech types’ ” (Yang qtd. in Yu & Vulpiani 306). This calls attention to the open-minded demographics on “Douban,” the bold, elaborative speakers who are also attentive listeners and critical thinkers. When one is willing to listen mindfully, the transmission of new music and political views is made easier, and the listener’s possibility for transformation of perspective, even identity, increases. Over the 8 years I have used “Douban,” I noticed more and more people dig into “Douban Musician” and participate in cultural events, developing recognition capabilities toward good, sincere music, and nourishing the potential for social action advocated by the musician/priest/warrior.

In this context, musicians no longer need to “walk the old path” by climbing out of the well, but they could be heard on another platform operated from within the well. This redirects the musician’s allocation of resources, and allows a home-based operation to be as effective as a travel-based one. Transculturation via micro and mass medias also expand listeners’ traditional musical tastes, facilitating the recognition of new musical genres such as Kawa’s reggae fusion. What does not change is a sense of sincerity, permeated into careful and honest music making that marks a fundamental human virtue. In this generation, the musical manifestation of this timeless virtue carries on over previous obstacles, accepted by a web of faceless listeners spread throughout the globe.

The “right place” is their Yunnan home that is not only culturally rich in and of itself, but also in resemblance of its sister land, Jamaica, gives birth to a natural musical fusion. Ai Yong comments on his return back to the right place, “I walk and walk and walk, going through a circle and finally realized that the real good stuff is still in Yunnan ... If this whole group of young Yunnan musicians rally together, this must be a pretty awesome place.” By walking a circle can one return to his cradle, and to discern one’s root is good. As Bob Marley sings in “Exodus,” “Open your eyes and look within: are you satisfied (with the life you’re living)? We know where we’re going / we know where we’re from / we’re leaving Babylon / we’re going to our Father’s land.” One could argue that truth is seen when one looks within to what is already there – the roots, the original resources connected to one’s poetic genius and divine intuition. It is seen with an opened third eye, wisdom, which gives pure, intrinsic knowledge. This knowledge includes knowing the goal, the history, what to leave and what to keep, guided by the heart clear from external noises. It provides one with a sense of clarity, a certainty about the direction one should go in and an ability to tell the right path from the wrong one. When one sees through the multilayered deception of “Babylon,” driven by the endless trap of temptation, dissatisfaction and desire, one chooses to leave it behind, repatriating to the mother/father land, and returning to home. In this light, Kawa’s exodus is a movement of Mother Earth’s people toward her womb/cave that, too, sets the captivated “frogs” free.

The “right people” refers to the harmony of the community, where each individual sincerely contributes to the collective goal, and is subsequently transformed through the process, like in a chemical reaction. For Kawa, the right time and place prompted their decision for collaboration, reuniting this group of childhood buddies from the four winds and seven seas, bonded by their shared belief in roots revival. As Ai Yong reflects, “We have come together once more. I think

everyone has changed qualitatively in certain aspects ... the reason why we get together is because we appreciate each other, because what we want to do and express are still the same.” This reunion is a symbiotic assembly to make Yunnan reggae, and also a reconnection of hearts that matured over the years. Like a postcolonial restoration that recognizes the significance of origin more clearly through the once-teary eyes, each band member learned the value of solidarity and forgiveness through a painfully sharpening experience, which makes the final return much more powerful and precious.

Conclusion

This thesis explains the fundamental context of Jamaican and Yunnan reggae, and compares the two in their music and politics exemplified by Kawa. The first chapter clarifies the similarities between the Wa and the Rastas in their musical context, which is deeply rooted in nature and spirituality. The product of fusion – Yunnan reggae – is not a rootless appropriation, but a syncretized genre with fertile soil, rich history and spontaneous connection. The fusion between Wa folk music and reggae, therefore, results to be organic and intuitive, rather than artificial and forced. Moreover, as Wa folk music slowly gets lost in the new world, Kawa is working to have old folk musicians playing and performing with them, continually defining and redefining Yunnan reggae in relation to Wa roots music. In this light, Yunnan reggae musicians take on the responsibility for cultural protection, restoration, and revival. They are riding the boat of reggae to carry their roots in the river of time.

Politically, the pre-colonial, autonomous history of the Wa was where Wa roots and essence were found to inspire its offspring, giving them a backbone to lean on. The Wa colonial history and postcolonial condition are comparable in fundamental ways to the Rastas' movement from oppression to freedom, loss to restoration, and trauma to healing. Yunnan reggae musicians such as Kawa play an important role in this transformative and transcendental process, using music as a major channel to praise, condemn, and educate. They have taken on the persona of modern Moba, or priests, who reconstruct ancient rituals assisted by the music of Jah. They are also warriors, who guide their cultural tradition against Babylon's co-optation and confusion, advocating for fundamental human virtues and wisdom across race and generation with sincerity and clarity.

As I have illustrated, Kawa's ultimate goal for a roots revival using reggae marks the

adaptation and acculturation of Wa folklore in a new context. During this process, Wa musicians are able to borrow the voice of reggae, because of the many similarities in context and message that catalyze and effectuate their mission. Moreover, using labor as a motif of comparison between these two songs and reggae narrows down the scope of discussion, while strengthens their connection once put in this universal labor context.

Further research can be done to expand major points in each chapter. For example, the recondite history of the Chinese influences on the establishment of Jamaican roots reggae provides a point of departure to look at how the Hakka connects with the Wa primarily in their ethnic minority status; its political implication when put in the context of communist Han China, and how this connection facilitates both groups' choice and interpretation of reggae. Another research topic is to look at the role of women played in the traditional Wa matriarchal society, how it has changed in today's context, and how this change has influenced Wa music and politics. More research can be done to compare other musical similarities between traditional Wa music and reggae besides the backbeat and the use of the wooden drum. This comparison may point to certain universal musical characteristics that embody a human sameness, such as those exemplified by the work song.

Appendix



Figure 1

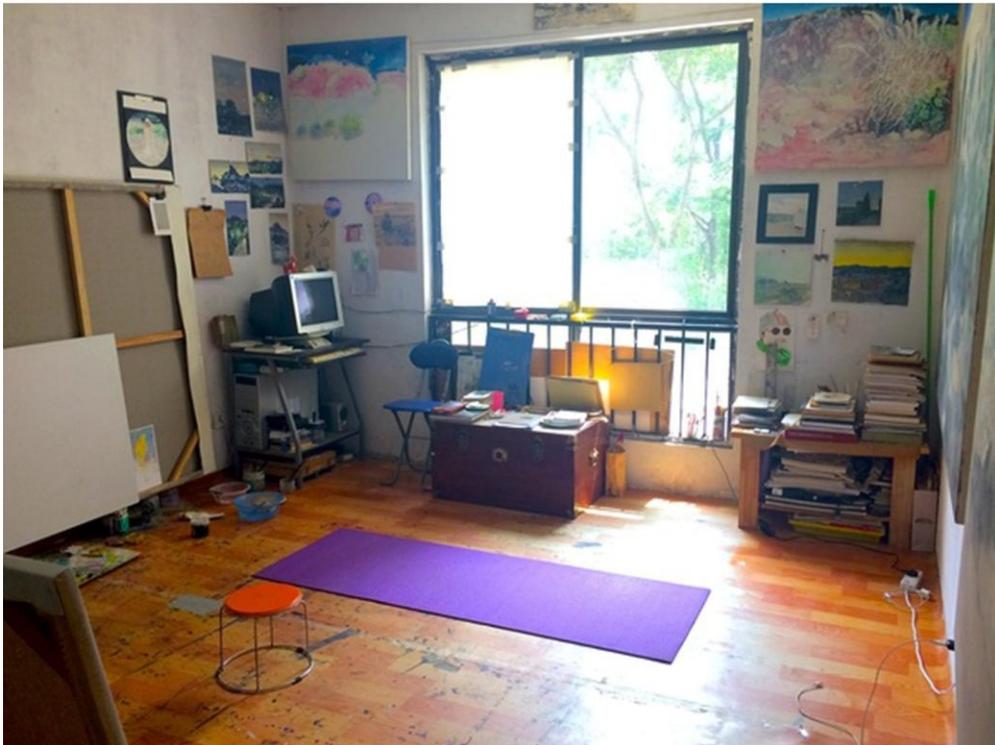


Figure 2



Figure 3

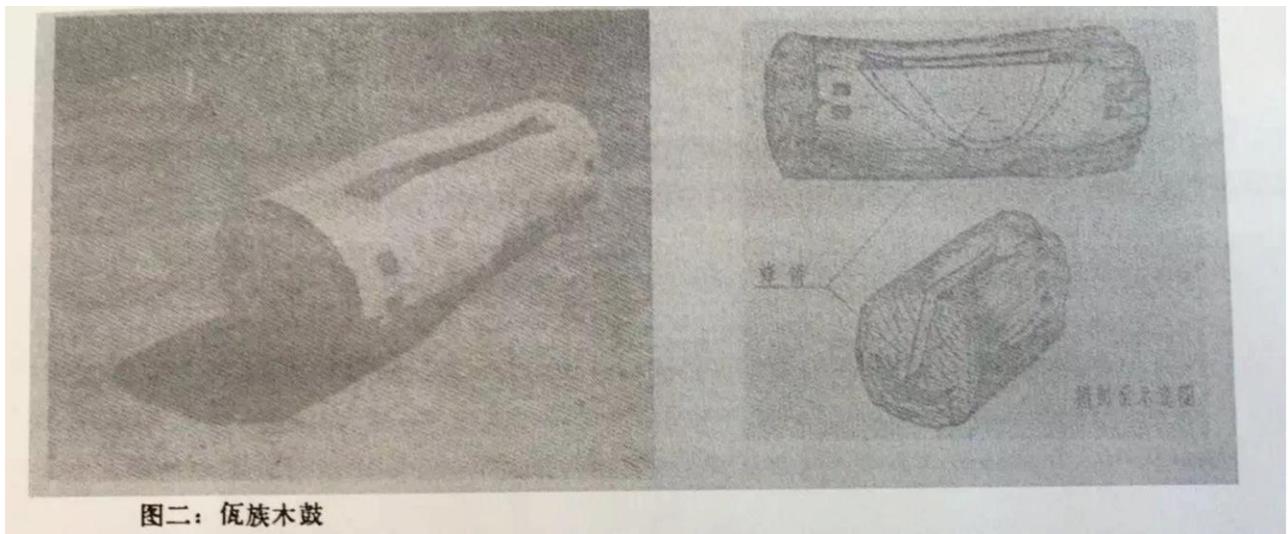


Figure 4



Figure 5



Photo 1.1
Traditional Wa thatched houses and the asbestos-tiled modern houses in a rural community in Menglai, Cangyuan County.
Photo by Tzu-kai Liu (2005)

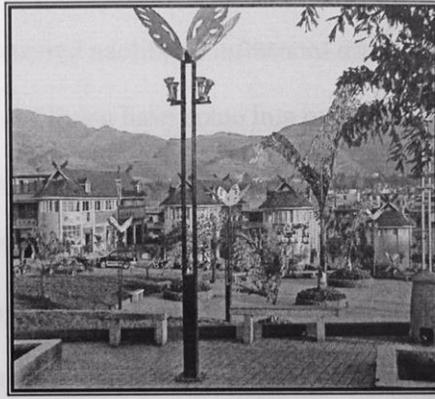


Photo 1.2
A new park at the downtown district of the border town of Cangyuan.
Photo by author (2004)

Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

豆瓣 **老黑** 豆瓣(408) 小黑的博客 退出

首页 播放列表 云南雷鬼-普洱土特产音乐 视频和图片 相册

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海报宣传栏

老黑的视频 (1) (全部)

乐队排练1
2016-03-20上传
0回应

老黑 (laohei)

kawa乐队排练中

老黑的其他博客

新浪微音乐
<http://music.weibo.com/t/s/1302152385.html>

论坛 (发言)

话题	作者	回应	更新时间
老黑	来自 姜小快	14	2016-05-11 18:02
老黑你好!	来自 孺蛇SlgSnake	6	2016-05-11 17:56
北京北京特柔大视听livehouse欢迎你们来伴奏...	来自 特柔大视听酒吧		2015-09-15 17:38
老黑的音乐介绍	来自 老黑	30	2015-04-21 09:36
啊	来自 魏		2013-07-07 12:20

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Figure 11

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