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Humanities II: Periods 1 and 2

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Bridging the Gap: Despite Controversy Surrounding LGBTQ+ Rights' Place in Mandopop, Jolin

Tsai's Calculated Risk Pays Off

*The feeling of the cold air conditioning mixing with the hot, humid air, water beading on skin. The aggressive car horns signaling bad drivers.*

"I'll bring up your luggage,"<sup>1</sup> my uncle said. "You and A-han must be tired after that long trip — sit down and rest."<sup>2</sup>

"Rui-rui<sup>3</sup>! You've grown up so much!" my aunt said, embracing me.

"Ma, she hasn't grown since 6th grade," A-han said pointedly as I rolled my eyes.

She laughed. "Ah, it's been so long since you've visited! What are your plans?"

"We're probably just going to explore Taipei with Wei-an! He's going to be our unofficial chaperone to make sure we're not up to mischief. After that I'll be visiting both sides of the family."<sup>4</sup> I rolled my eyes. "So many people to meet! I don't have the energy for that."

High pitched laughter came from further down the hall. "That's the Rui-rui I know,"

Wei-an said. "Honestly, you look the same to me."

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<sup>1</sup> In Taiwan, people predominantly speak Mandarin Chinese (the official language). Although the main characters are likely conversing in Mandarin, for the sake of readability, understandability, and consistency, the dialogue will all be present in English. Translations were performed by the author unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> In many Asian countries, including Taiwan, if parents speak out, from simple things such as loading luggage into a car to big life decisions such as marriage partners, children are typically expected to listen without objection, following the Confucian concept of filial piety. (Lu 210-211)

<sup>3</sup> Rui-rui (瑞瑞) is a Taiwanese-American girl. Her character, to some degree, is based on the author.

<sup>4</sup> Many Taiwanese-Americans, like Rui-rui, often visit Taiwan to acquaint themselves with the culture and to meet family; this is the primary purpose of the trip in the story. As a result, they often spend their time with family doing various (more traditional) vacation activities such as sightseeing. A-han (阿漢) is Rui-rui's maternal cousin, who was born and raised in Taipei but studies in the United States and is approximately the same age as Rui-rui. Wei-an (韋鞍) is also Rui-rui's maternal cousin, who was born and raised in Taichung, who is a few years older than Rui-rui.

I propelled myself into my favorite cousin's arms as everyone laughed. "I didn't know you would be here this early!"

"I figured you and A-han would need the supervision, and the Pride Parade is happening tomorrow,"<sup>5</sup> he said. "It's the first year after gay marriage was legalized, so this is going to be a big deal.<sup>6</sup> I'm planning on going with Ning-feng to celebrate. Do you and A-han want to come?" he asked, looking sideways at A-han's parents.

"I'll go with you," I said. Wei-an had spent years battling an inner identity crisis over his sexuality, especially with his mother's traditional beliefs, and it wasn't until he had met his boyfriend that I'd seen him this passionate about something.

A-han looked at his parents. "Am I allowed to go?" he asked tentatively.

"I think you should stay at home," my aunt said uncomfortably. "What if something bad happens? Not everyone is like Wei-an, a good and successful child.<sup>7</sup> There are plenty of bad people out there."<sup>8</sup>

"He's not a kid anymore. He should be free to make his own choices," my uncle said. "Besides, nothing bad will happen. It's a peaceful demonstration, after all."

"A-yi<sup>9</sup>, nothing will happen to them. The Pride Parade hasn't had issues in the past in terms of safety, and we're taking every moment to celebrate for ourselves, instead of fighting

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<sup>5</sup> Taiwan hosts an annual Pride Parade, which was the first in eastern Asia. It has since grown to be Asia's largest Pride Parade, well known throughout Asia and the rest of the world. "By 2003, less than a decade later, Taipei was leading the LGBT movement in Asia by holding the region's first Gay Pride Parade (this year's Pride was in October)." (Chang, "Out in Taiwan: Taipei's Not-So-Hidden Lesbian Scene")

<sup>6</sup> Same sex marriage was legalized in Taiwan on May 17, 2019, which went into effect on May 24, 2019. (Lu, "Taiwan's Same-Sex Marriage Law Could Change the Debate in Asia Forever") The story is set in late summer/early fall 2019.

<sup>7</sup> A significant amount of anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment comes from fear of the not normative. "Thus, in Taiwan, objections to homosexuality have not been primarily religious, but rather rooted in expectations concerning the gendered reproduction of the patrilineal household." (Brainer, "Mothering Gender and Sexually Nonconforming Children in Taiwan")

<sup>8</sup> People considered "different" are often also labelled as "dangerous"; this is not unique to the LGBTQ+ community or even Asia. Rui-rui's aunt is implying that there may be "bad" gay marchers. The author has witnessed similar comments firsthand.

<sup>9</sup> A-yi (阿姨) means "aunt" in Mandarin.

others,” Wei-an sighed, expecting this to happen. “Ma-ma was the one who suggested that I bring Rui-rui and A-han as straight allies, since we find great strength in numbers.”

“LGBTQ+ supporters<sup>10</sup> are often just as bad, especially those celebrities that take their fame to help vocalize their stances.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, they get turned bad, too! Look at Jolin! She’s always wearing those revealing, racy things at her concerts — does she have no shame?”<sup>12</sup> My aunt shook her head. “That’s only good for money. And then she throws all of the good business away with her LGBTQ+ music! I never liked her music, but I avoid it now.”

My uncle rolled his eyes. “Jolin’s fashion sense has nothing to do with the gays<sup>13</sup>, and in fact, her LGBTQ+ songs have possibly even increased her popularity.<sup>14</sup> I think it’s great that she’s willing to support equal rights for them, unlike your very conservative mind<sup>15</sup>, and I think it’s more than fair to let A-han do the same. Go support Wei-an!”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Many Taiwanese artists vocalize their support on a variety of issues on social media, with one such issue being LGBTQ+ rights and equality.

<sup>11</sup> In 2017, a group of eight female East Asian singers collaborated on a LGBTQ+ themed song “[We Are One](#)”. (Strong) Since then, many similar collaborations have ensued. Taiwanese celebrities also often show their support through social media posts such as [this one on the 2020 Pride Parade](#). Jolin, the focus of this paper, [posted in 2019](#) herself when news broke that Taiwan’s Parliament legalized same-sex marriage. (“Taiwan gay marriage: Parliament legalises same-sex unions.”)

<sup>12</sup> [Jolin Tsai](#), arguably one of the most famous Taiwanese female singers, known as the Queen of C-Pop, was among the first to speak on LGBTQ+ rights through her songs. She is very famous in Asia for her stage presence and ostentatious outfits, which have often been pinpointed by the media, and in 2019, she spoke out against them for focusing on her breasts in a photo. (Looi) Regardless of the general perception of her style, her supporters have described it as “campy” and inspiring to everyone around them. “I remember when I was a high school student, when [*Dancing Diva*] came out, it was phenomenal. Everyone was dancing, everyone was doing yoga because of Jolin Tsai, and every girl was copying her style and every gay man [was] dancing. And every single shop was just playing every single song in her album. It’s not just in Taiwan, it’s in China, Malaysia, [in the whole] Chinese speaking world, and it was just a sensation.” (Shih, “Personal Interview”)

<sup>13</sup> “Gay” and “LGB” are often used synonymously in Taiwan, while “transgender” is somewhat considered separately. For people outside of the Taiwanese LGBTQ+ community, there’s not a lot of awareness yet for other labels, so the term “gay” is applied very liberally.

<sup>14</sup> Jolin’s first explicitly LGBTQ+ song was a massive controversy in many Chinese speaking countries full of her fans. Her 2014 hit “We’re All Different, Yet the Same” was even banned by Singapore’s Media Development Authority (MDA) because of its “mature content”. (Lee)

<sup>15</sup> Rui-rui’s uncle and aunt have very different stances to LGBTQ+ rights. Her uncle is using this to try to present his position to convince her aunt in a somewhat teasing and less direct manner.

<sup>16</sup> Like in many other countries, LGBTQ+ rights are greatly intertwined with politics. Although northern Taiwan is considered to be more liberal and well educated, this did not necessarily correlate to broader LGBTQ+ acceptance. “There’s an assumption a lot of people have that if you’re in Taipei, it’s going to be gay friendly, and if you’re out of Taipei, it’s not, it’s going to be really conservative. In the area that I look at, family, that didn’t really turn out to be true. ... There are families in Taipei who are really conservative, there are families in other places who are not. There’s a lot of spread now where families live. ... I think there’s a lot more connectedness, and sometimes

A-han broke out into a grin, punching his fist into the air. “Pride Parade, here we come!”

*The sun, beaming down and illuminating dark haired heads. The smell of exhaust and drain water. The plethora of sounds creating a symphony of noise in the background.*

“Who is that?” I asked Wei-an as I watched an old lady busily moving around equipment on the massive platform. Next to us, A-han and Ning-feng waved pride flags and took photos as we waited for the performances to begin on stage before the march.

“That’s Yeh Yung-Chih’s mother,” he said. When he saw my quizzical look, he continued, “Do you know the story of the Rose Boy?”<sup>17</sup>

I scratched my head, trying to recall the familiar phrase. “I remember watching a documentary related to Jolin on it a few years ago, but I don’t remember the details,” I said.<sup>18</sup>

“Before you two were born, there was an incident at a Pingtung<sup>19</sup> high school where a gay high school boy was mysteriously found in a pool of blood,” he said. “Everyone now thinks that it was due to the bullying he received for being effeminate, although we’re still not really sure what caused his death. His school even claimed he died of heart disease, which is absolutely absurd. He was a perfectly healthy kid, why would he have died of heart disease? As a result, the court didn’t convict anyone in his death years ago.”<sup>20</sup>

Releasing his frustration, he paused, taking a breath to steady himself.

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immediately visible.”(Brainer, “Personal Interview”) However, college educated Gen Xers were found to be open minded partially because they grew up in post martial law Taiwan. (He 198)

<sup>17</sup> The Rose Boy (玫瑰少年) is a reference to Yeh Yung-Chih (葉永鋕), a high school student in Taiwan who was found in a pool of blood on April 20, 2000 in a school bathroom. He was later pronounced dead from his injuries, which were attributed to bullying over his effeminate mannerisms. (Samson) Yeh is his surname, which comes first in Chinese names.

<sup>18</sup> The documentary in question is available at [youtu.be/V\\_M9ZId2QAY](https://youtu.be/V_M9ZId2QAY). (蔡依林 Jolin Tsai, “【蔡依林PLAY世界巡迴演唱會- 臺北站】「不一樣又怎樣」紀錄片-葉永鋕篇”)

<sup>19</sup> Pingtung is the southernmost county in Taiwan.

<sup>20</sup> Six years after Yeh’s death, some degree of justice was served. “In 2006, the Kaohsiung branch of Taiwan’s High Court sentenced the school’s principal and two other officials to five months, four months and three months, respectively, in prison for ‘neglecting the degree of care required by their occupation.’” (Samson)

“That could’ve been me, too,” he said quietly. “If the government hadn’t established the Gender Education Equality Act after his death, I could very well have been in his position 15 years later.”<sup>21</sup>

I sighed. “That makes me so sad — it wasn’t like he had done something wrong.”

“The sad reality is that not everyone understands it like you do, Laurie. Many people do think being gay is wrong. You know how conservative my mother is, right? She doesn’t get it,” A-han said. “Taiwan as a whole, particularly the older generations, are still very conservative.”

Wei-an nodded. “A-han definitely has a point. My mother was the same way too, before I came out — you two know that better than anyone else. Beyond the straight population, though, there’s also a lot of disagreement within the LGBTQ+ community as well. In some cases, the largest criticism comes from other gay people.”<sup>22</sup>

“This is a broader phenomenon, too, I think,” I said. “It’s similar to how often in the States, I feel like the most racist hatred comes from other Asian-Americans, rather than other races, as you might expect.”

“Exactly, so it’s also hard to unite and fight for justice,” Ning-feng said. “Yeh Yung-Chih’s mother is trying to raise enough awareness about LGBTQ+ rights to both queer and straight audiences so she can protect other kids like her son.”

“I’m sure that he’s watching from heaven, proud of the work that she’s doing,” I said.

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<sup>21</sup> The Gender Education Equality Act (性別平等教育法) was put into effect by the Ministry of Education (教育部) two years after Yeh’s death. (Chang, “Taipei Watcher: Gone But Not Forgotten”) It addressed gender education in schools, gender and sexual harassment prevention, and intervention and discipline methods in case of perpetrators. (GEEA 22, 23, 25)

<sup>22</sup> “Camp is something that is very controversial in queer theory because there are some gay men who do not like the idea of camp ... some of them are ... like misogynistic gay men. They’re like, ‘Oh, we’re metro-gay, you know, we’re not like them and we don’t like campy gays,’ and I’m just like, ‘I think you’re just a very misogynistic and homophobic gay man.’ ... In the queer community, some of the scholars or queer critics ... actually critique gay marriage, because they see that as a kind of like how gay people are being ... mainstreamed and being incorporated into part of this really ‘evil’ institution. They want to stay outside of marriage altogether, so there is a lot of conflict within the queer community as well. ... I think it’s very interesting and important to acknowledge differences, and sometimes conflict within the queer community and not see the queer community as something that is unified, or monolithic. It’s actually very heterogeneous as well.” (Shih, “Personal Interview”)

A-han looked at Wei-an. “I guess our duty is to do whatever we can to support the cause.”

“A lot of people share that sentiment. That’s why so many people are here today, even if they’re straight! Like you two,” he said, laughing as he put his arm around Ning-feng’s shoulders. “I feel like allies of gay people are incredibly important in trying to bridge this gap — actually, awareness throughout the rest of Taiwan is crucial. That’s something Jolin does really well.”<sup>23</sup>

“That’s part of the reason she wrote ‘Womxnly’, right?” A-han asked. “She’s so famous everywhere in Asia; I’m sure this has made a big difference.”<sup>24</sup>

Wei-an nodded. “She wanted to honor Yeh Yung-Chih; the whole song was written about how there was an effeminate ‘Rose Boy’ — how he should’ve been allowed to live however he wanted to, without discrimination or hatred from others. Jolin recognized that his story needed to be told and she has many supporters that she can share this message with, which they, in turn, can pass on, similar to how I’m sharing her message with people like A-yi and my mother.”

“I really admire how she uses music as a platform to share her support,”<sup>25</sup> A-han said.

I agreed. “Since I was born after Yeh Yung-Chih’s death and I grew up in the US, I didn’t really know who he was, but his legacy has reached me through Jolin.”

“That’s exactly what she’s going for,” Wei-an said. “As a Chinese speaker, even halfway across the world, you’re able to participate in this movement as an ally. In fact, you’re the perfect example of how her calculated risk has successfully paid off.”

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<sup>23</sup> “[‘We’re All Different, Yet the Same’ and ‘Womxnly’] are very, very easy for the mostly straight audience to understand that Jolin Tsai [is] supporting gay rights.” (Shih, “Personal Interview”)

<sup>24</sup> Previous Jolin hits have spread like wildfire across Asia, predominantly through Chinese speakers. “Every single shop was just like playing every single song in [*Dancing Diva*]. It’s not just in Taiwan, it’s in China, Malaysia, like all this Chinese speaking world, and it was just a sensation.” (Shih, “Personal Interview”) Later albums of Jolin have become international hits, such as her fourteenth studio album, *Play*, which was released in 2014. (Tang) This has paved the way for her to share her music with a much broader audience.

<sup>25</sup> “The impact of Yeh’s life and death has had years to permeate through Tsai’s artistry, going back to her decision to screen a five-minute documentary featuring Yeh’s mother during her 2015 concert series.” (Tham)

“How so?” I asked, confused.

“This wasn’t the first song she released that dove into LGBTQ+ controversy,”<sup>26</sup> Wei-an said. “Do you remember which song got banned by Singapore for the music video?”<sup>27</sup>

“‘We’re All Different, Yet the Same’, right, where she kissed Ruby Lin?” A-han asked. “I remember my mom telling me to stop listening to the song. She was so mad about it, about you listening to it with me.”

“Aw, I’m sorry. A-yi and Singapore’s MTA had the same reaction, though. They banned it because the song was ‘unsuitable for broadcast’, whatever that means, and that’s definitely a risk Jolin took when she released it. There was always a chance that Chinese-speaking countries would ban the song, or worse yet, even censor her. Many of her critics agreed, saying there was no place for political drama in music. A lot of people were also worried that this would decrease her popularity, but some argue that it’s actually boosted it more. After Singapore banned it, many people privately went online to listen to the song and see what the fuss was about. In the end, it looks like her gamble did pay off, and many people ended up listening to her song.”

“Sometimes any publicity is good publicity,” A-han said, laughing.

Wei-an laughed along. “‘We’re All Different, Yet the Same’, which was dedicated to Yeh Yung-Chih, was actually the first step Jolin took in sharing his story. That’s where the documentary comes in — it was released a few months after the song was released. Jolin interviewed his mother about the incident, and although the emotional documentary itself was only 5 minutes long, its impact has lasted much longer. With this level of success in publicizing

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<sup>26</sup> In 2012, Jolin released “[Dr. Jolin](#)” and “[Fantasy](#)” as part of *Muse*, her twelfth studio album, which featured a pregnant man and rainbow scenes talking about equal love, respectively. These were massive hits that, although generated controversy, encouraged her to continue exploring gender and sexuality in her music. However, this paper will focus more on her 2014 hit “We’re All Different, Yet the Same” due to its connection to Yeh Yung-Chih.

<sup>27</sup> As previously mentioned in footnote 14, Singapore banned “We’re All Different, Yet the Same” for television and radio broadcast. Popularity soared following the incident. “‘Over the weekend, the YouTube views from Singapore viewers have doubled. The number of shares for this music video on Facebook has been exploding. The buzz created by this ban is amazing.’” (Lee)

his story, Jolin began crafting something even more monumental: the release of ‘Womxnly’ in 2018.”

A-han and I looked at each other in realization. “So these two songs are actually related?”

Wei-an nodded. “She didn’t do this for business purposes. She’s always had a big gay fanbase, and she’s said before that she loves supporting both her fans and her friends.”<sup>28</sup> Although she might not have realized it, even before she ostentatiously supported the gay community, gay people were influenced by her art.”<sup>29</sup>

“What does that mean?” I asked.

“It’s no secret that both of us have been Jolin fans since our childhoods.” I nodded. “The reasons you loved her were different from mine, though. You enjoyed her performances, but I admired her feminine persona, her confidence. She was a figure of femininity long before she released those two songs, when she was still purely an artist, which inspired me to experiment with my identity. Without her, I wouldn’t have really learned what being gay meant.”<sup>30</sup>

“I didn’t know — I’m glad something we enjoyed so much together was able to help you form your identity,” I said.

“Not surprisingly, the experiences gay people have had with Jolin’s music are staunchly different in comparison to straight people.”<sup>31</sup> Her music previously shaped the identities of many

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<sup>28</sup> “I have many LGBTQ friends and fans, and many of these music videos and songs were made to share their real-life stories and real emotions.” (Herman)

<sup>29</sup> For gay men, Jolin was considered an underground gay icon extending all the way past to the start of her career in the late 1990s to 2000s. “I want to argue [in my articles] that long before [she released ‘We’re All Different, Yet the Same’ and ‘Womxnly’], she has been a gay icon. It’s not just these two songs, but I feel that because people focus on these two songs so much, they ignore ... her whole career.” (Shih, “Personal Interview”)

<sup>30</sup> Inspired by Shih’s real life experiences. “During lunch breaks, I secretly practiced Jolin’s dance moves at a school corner, trying to preserve my femininity against the disciplinary force of the male homosocial space. It was a daily ritual, a survival tactic, an everyday practice in a de Certeau way.” (Shih, “Divafication: A Queer of Color Memoir”)

<sup>31</sup> There’s this idea in queer studies called queer reading or gay reading, [which is how] if you’re a gay person, you [can] secretly see something in some song, ... but if you’re [part of the] straight audience it’s hard for you to see the undertones.” (Shih, “Personal Interview”)



gay men,<sup>32</sup> but now it's her time to shine with everyone else. It's her time to reach those who have yet to understand the importance and meaning of gay rights in Taiwan and elsewhere. She's revolutionized the LGBTQ+ movement and Taiwan with what she has done," Wei-an said. "She knows how popular she is now, too, and she's riding on that popularity.<sup>33</sup> In the past, she's always been the victim of controversy and criticism over her novel ideas, but with such widespread support in Chinese speaking areas around the world, her fanbase has expanded to the point where they're outweighing her opponents. She has shown that she's capable of doing much more with her art than just sustaining herself.<sup>34</sup> She's helped change happen in ways no one else has."<sup>35</sup>

Just then, a loud tap came from the stage. "Can everyone hear me?" a man waving a pride flag asked.

"Yes!" we shouted back in response.

"Alright! We have a very special guest today — let's welcome her to the stage!" he said.

The crowd buzzed in excitement. Who could it be?

"Hello, Taipei!" Jolin shouted.

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<sup>32</sup> "One of the most groundbreaking ideas in queer theory is that queer identity itself is a construct. It's very different from the mainstream discourse as being, 'You are born to be dead, ... be who you are,' because that is a kind of assumption that there is a kind of core self inside, but your theory can deconstruct it and then argues that our identity is actually in the process of being shaped and being foreign and you'll learn a kind of behavior, kind of identity from pop culture or ... from everything surrounding you. I'll say that the diva is like before my gay identity. Without a diva, I wouldn't even be gay." (Shih, "Personal Interview")

<sup>33</sup> The popularity of her fourteenth studio album, *Ugly Beauty*, has marked a shift in that she's consciously realized her gay followers as a distinct group. "I feel that, once she started to realize that she has this queer following, ... it's impossible for her to undo that." (Shih, "Personal Interview")

<sup>34</sup> Although Jolin has ultimately achieved an international celebrity status, she's done more than that. She's a multit talented "diva" in terms of both her art, activism, and hobbies. "With all the talent that she has, Tsai is so much more than just a singer. She's a diva who shines in every aspect, and she's a true role model to our generation. Although she's already reached an incredible degree of success in her life, we can't wait to see what Queen Jolin has up her sleeve for us in the next few years." (Chuang)

<sup>35</sup> Shih notes that Jolin has used her songs to explicitly promote support for LGBTQ+ rights, which has attracted the straight audience, while the gay audience has also continued its underground support of detailed parts of her music. Her music has brought together both groups through different entry points. "I feel that ['We're All Different, Yet the Same' and 'Womxnly'] are used as a kind of promotion in a way? ... It's very out there ... very easy for the mostly straight audience to understand that Jolin Tsai supports gay rights. ... [Conversely,] I feel like once she started to realize that she has this queer or gay following, it's impossible for her to undo that." (Shih, "Personal Interview")

“Oh my god — it’s her! It’s Jolin!” I could hardly contain my excitement. I looked at Wei-an, Ning-feng, and A-han; their eyes glistened with excitement.

“Thank you for having me here — I’m honored that I get to represent part of this wonderful community, whether it’s through my actions or my music,” she said.

“No, thank you for supporting us,” the man said, as the crowd continued to cheer.

“I’m here today to bring a special performance, dedicating it to my LGBTQ+ fans and allies.<sup>36</sup> Although we’ve truly come far, we still have much more to go. Let us keep marching for rights for ourselves and our loved ones, so one day, some day, we can all enjoy the same freedoms and rights, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. We are all humans — we deserve both equality and love,”<sup>37</sup> she said. “I present ‘Womxnly’ to everyone here today, and anyone else that may be watching elsewhere in the world.”<sup>38</sup>

With that, we began to sing together. Together, collectively as a crowd, a sea of people, we danced along to the music. It was a powerful feeling, how we moved as one to share our message with the world.

*Born as a human, you have no sin  
You don't need to be sorry  
One day I will be you baby boy  
And you gon' be me*

*Same shit happens every day  
After you left, did the world change?  
So much caused by ignorance, the incident passed but we can't move on  
We can't forget Yung-Chih, the past can't disappear*

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<sup>36</sup> Although Jolin herself is not gay, she achieves an equivalent status as a gay icon. “Lesbian women and gay men may strategically deploy financially successful LGBTQ+ celebrities to demonstrate to their parents that they are the ‘OK kind of gay’ (p. 89).” (Chen) Billboard has also recognized this status and interviewed her, asking “How does it feel being considered one of Taiwan’s and Asia’s most popular gay icons?” (Herman)

<sup>37</sup> ““I have many LGBTQ friends and fans, and many of these music videos and songs were made to share their real-life stories and real emotions. ... I think with the help of extensive media coverage by globalized news media and social media, there will be more and more people paying attention to and respecting equal rights of minority groups, such as marriage equality, gender equality, and equal rights for LGBTQ+.” (Herman)

<sup>38</sup> Taiwan’s Pride Parade is well known internationally, getting media coverage from all major international news outlets, which is especially prominent given Taiwan’s status as a leader in Asian LGBTQ+ equality.

*Don't let anyone change you  
You can be him or her, both are okay  
There will be someone who loves you wholeheartedly*<sup>39</sup>

I hugged A-han, Ning-feng, and Wei-an as the waves of sound washed over me, as we cheered for the future of rights in Taiwan for everyone.

As the song came to an end, Jolin bowed. “I’m sure many of you know the story of the Rose Boy. Although he is no longer with us today, his mother has continued to fight for him and other children like him. Let’s welcome Yeh Yung-Chih’s mother!” she exclaimed, motioning for her to take the microphone.<sup>40</sup>

“I’m more than happy to see you all,” she cheered. “Today, we’re here to show the world that we, here in Taipei, will fight until we get what is right!”

The crowd roared in response. Around me, I could see that in fact, although the majority of the crowd was Taiwanese, there were also people from other countries. Everywhere, I could see Pride flags, but enmeshed between them were many country flags — many people from elsewhere were representing their people here.<sup>41</sup>

“My kids, you have to be brave. God created people like you to fight for your human rights. Be yourself. Don’t be afraid,” she said. “My kids, don’t cry. Your tears show you are weak. But we’ve done nothing wrong at all. We have to face the sunlight to fight for our right.”

As I looked around, many were crying, but they began wiping the tears off of their faces.

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<sup>39</sup> Lyrics to select verses of “Womxnly” (玫瑰少年) by Jolin Tsai. The original lyrics include a mix of both English and Mandarin.

<sup>40</sup> Based on the 2010 Kaohsiung Pride Parade. Translations were taken from the video, although mildly abridged for grammar. (蔡依林 Jolin Tsai, “【蔡依林PLAY世界巡迴演唱會- 臺北站】”)

<sup>41</sup> Taiwan’s Pride Parade is the largest and most famous in Asia and among the most famous around the world, consistently attracting many people from places in the world without LGBTQ+ support. Accommodations are generally made for both Mandarin and English speakers, as can be seen on the Pride Parade’s official website, which can be found at [www.taiwanpride.lgbt/](http://www.taiwanpride.lgbt/).

“Although we’ve come this far, we still have so much farther we have to go. Together, united as one country, one culture, one community, we can do this!”

Standing between Wei-an and A-han, I linked my hands with theirs, as Wei-an put his hand in Ning-feng’s. Together, raising them into the air, we began to march.<sup>42</sup>

*Sharp, jagged mountains lining the freeway. Mopeds weaving in between cars on city streets. Colorful street signs lining storied buildings, filled with businesses.*

As I sat down in the restaurant, I found myself between A-han and Wei-an’s mother.

“How was the Pride Parade?” my aunt asked.

“It was wonderful! I thought Jolin’s performance of ‘Womxnly’ was awesome,” I said. “It was very passionate and emotional.”

“Ah, yes, very typical of her. I think it’s great how she’s used her catchy songs to show her support for gay rights,” she said.

“We were talking about this at the Parade — how using songs, Jolin’s able to bridge the LGBTQ+ acceptance divide between straight and queer people,” I said. “That’s what she’s done for you, right?”

“Yes. When Wei-an first came out, I wasn’t very accepting of him. Like many others around me, I thought it was wrong. However, I’ve been a fan of Jolin’s songs since she debuted, even if I thought her performances were too flashy. As I was following Jolin’s songs, and the Rose Boy song came out, I suddenly remembered the story of Yeh Yung-Chih, and I came to realize that I’d been thinking about it all wrong,” she said. “What if I had lost Wei-an? He’s not a bad kid, and he eventually turned out okay. Although I’m still trying to wrap my head around it,

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<sup>42</sup> Based on photos of the 2019 Pride Parade. (“In pictures: Thousands join Pride parade in Taiwan”)

Jolin's made me rethink my beliefs, and now when people ask me how to 'deal with' a gay boy, I often share Jolin's songs with them."

I nodded. Although my aunt had come very far, she still had some of her conservative beliefs left in her; she accepted Wei-an as he was, but I could still see some hesitation in her views of stereotypical "gay boys". In comparison to A-han's mother, though, she was ahead in leaps and bounds.

She smiled. "She's been around in the music industry for a long time, and she's quite famous for what she does. She's highly respected by many even in our generation, especially for her artistry and hard work."<sup>43</sup> It's far more effective than whatever we see in the news that gets put out by the government."

"Ma-ma talks about that a lot, how so much of Taiwanese culture is tied with TV shows and Mandopop,"<sup>44</sup> I said. "I guess that's why I consumed so much of that media when I was little!"<sup>45</sup>

She laughed. "Both of your parents really love it. On a deeper level, though, music is really able to act as a medium for change, since it's so easy to listen to."<sup>46</sup> Of course, it's also able to do so many more things in the same way, like it's helped you reach your Taiwanese roots. Look — you're even doing something more than just appreciating Jolin's music. You're actively

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<sup>43</sup> As indicated at the beginning of the story by A-han's mother, naturally, there are also people who don't support Jolin. However, those who do recognize her power applaud her for her progressiveness and activism.

<sup>44</sup> Although this paper focused on Jolin and the Rose Boy's impact through "Womxnly", Jolin has many other hits that have impacted Taiwan. With a staggering fourteen studio albums to date, she has no shortage of works that have generated both controversy and change. Additionally, many other artists in Taiwan have woven topics of LGBTQ+ rights into their work. From songs such as "[Rainbow](#)" by A-mei to movies like "[Your Name Engraved Herein](#)" and TV dramas such as "[Someday or One Day](#)", the author encourages those who are interested to take a look themselves.

<sup>45</sup> The author's parents strongly encouraged the consumption of Taiwanese idol dramas and Mandopop so she could practice her Mandarin and be immersed in Taiwanese culture.

<sup>46</sup> "Compared to written texts and videos, listening to music offers a few potential advantages. First, most songs generally last no more than a few minutes." (Byrd and Levy)

participating in her movements, actively generating change with her. People like you make a difference.”

I smiled. “Thank you, A-yi. That means a lot.”

Together, as we sat in the restaurant, we began to chatter about other things — taking pictures with grandparents, teasing energetic younger cousins, getting scolded by older relatives. “Rui-rui, stop staring off into space!” A-han said.

“It’s time to eat — we can fangirl over Jolin another time,” Wei-an laughed.

*Surrounded by my loved ones, one step at a time, we can change the world to make it a better place for them. For all of us.*

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