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Abstract

1990s : dakou (打口) CDs and tapes. Literally meaning " cut" or " gashed," the term dakou refers to CDs and tapes illegally sold on the Chinese black market in the 1990s, which had been shipped to China from the West in order to recycle unsold CDs and tapes. To prevent them from being sold on the black market, these CDs and tapes were cut (打) on the edges (口) in order to render them useless. This did not take into account, however, that an audio disc is read from the center to the outer edge, so only the last track was lost. A large part of this musical waste was sold for a cheap price on the black market in large cities in China, in defiance of official censorship, since a lot of Western pop music was forbidden. This paper tackles the question of dakou nostalgia by the members of the "dakou generation" through a study of various accounts, as well as stories and articles that have been published in the past few years, shedding new light on this unprecedented phenomenon.

Résumé

Un objet inédit a transformé en profondeur la scène culturelle chinoise dans les années 1990 : les CD et cassettes dakou (打口). Littéralement «encocher» , le terme de *dakou* fait alors référence aux disques et cassettes audio vendus illégalement sur le marché noir chinois dans les années 1990 en provenance des pays occidentaux qui envoient par cargo des conteneurs entiers de disques et cassettes invendus afin d'être recyclés. Pour éviter que ces produits ne soient détournés et revendus illégalement, les disques et cassettes sont cassés (da 打) à leur extrémité (kou 口) afin de les rendre inutilisables. C'était sans compter sur le fait qu'un disque audio se lit de son centre vers sa périphérie, et en cassant l'extrémité d'un CD, seul le dernier morceau était inécoutable. Une partie de ces déchets musicaux se retrouve sur le marché noir des grandes villes chinoises, vendus à bas prix, et défiant la censure officielle, qui interdit une grande partie de la musique pop occidentale. Cet article entend aborder la question de la nostalgie de ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler la «génération dakou» à travers une analyse des témoignages, récits et articles qui se sont multipliés ces dernières années et qui apportent un nouvel éclairage sur ce phénomène inédit.

摘要

馬泰然 (Nathanel Amar) :"打口"在中國的多重命運：從垃圾到懷舊二十世紀九十年代，一個嶄新的東西深深地改變了中國文化景觀，那就是打口。打口的字面義表示"缺口"，這個詞指的是中國九十年代當中黑市裡非法販賣的唱片、光盤和磁帶，這些貨品來自西方國家由輪船運到中國的全部都是唱片和帶子的貨櫃，但沒賣出而被收回的。爲了不讓這些貨物被非法轉賣，它們的邊角被打破，因而無法再使用。不過，這麼做，倒是沒想到一點，就是使用時，唱盤的取讀都從中央向外進行，所以缺口的打口仍然可使用，除了最後一段。這些音樂垃圾因此流傳在大城市的黑市裡，非常便宜，挑戰著官方監控，因大部分的西方流行音樂都被官方禁止。本文首先處理可稱之爲"打口一代人"的懷舊問題，經由分析最近幾年來越來越多的與之相關的見證、故事和文章，它們都對這個嶄新的現象提供了一個新照明。

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Nathanel Amar*

The Lives of *Dakou* in China: From Waste to Nostalgia

Résumé – Un objet inédit a transformé en profondeur la scène culturelle chinoise dans les années 1990 : les CD et cassettes dakou *(打□). Littéralement « encocher », le terme de* dakou *fait alors référence aux disques et cassettes audio vendus illégalement sur le marché noir chinois dans les années 1990 en provenance des pays occidentaux qui envoient par cargo des conteneurs entiers de disques et cassettes invendus afin d'être recyclés. Pour éviter que ces produits ne soient détournés et revendus illégalement, les disques et cassettes sont cassés (*da *打) à leur extrémité (*kou *□) afin de les rendre inutilisables. C'était sans compter sur le fait qu'un disque audio se lit de son centre vers sa périphérie, et en cassant l'extrémité d'un CD, seul le dernier morceau était inécoutable. Une partie de ces déchets musicaux se retrouve sur le marché noir des grandes villes chinoises, vendus à bas prix, et défiant la censure officielle, qui interdit une grande partie de la musique pop occidentale. Cet article entend aborder la question de la nostalgie de ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler la « génération dakou » à travers une analyse des témoignages, récits et articles qui se sont multipliés ces dernières années et qui apportent un nouvel éclairage sur ce phénomène inédit.*

The Chinese cultural life in the 1990s was for many observers marked by a mundane yet peculiar set of objects: *dakou* (打□) CDs and tapes. Literally meaning "cut" but often translated as "saw-gashed" or "scrapped," the term *dakou* designates the foreign CDs and tapes which were sold on the Chinese black market in the 1990s. These CDs and cassette tapes arrived in China as waste to be recycled; they

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were cut on their edges to prevent them from being resold. However, it was still possible to repair the tapes or listen to most of the CDs, and soon *dakou* products flooded the black market of major Chinese cities in the mid-1990s. For some scholars and writers, the *dakou* CDs and tapes radically changed the Chinese cultural sphere of the 1990s, allowing a new generation of young Chinese, who did not experience the Tian'anmen trauma, to listen to foreign music – pop, rock or even classical music – to form new bands, or to write as music critics. Some writers even described the 1990s as the "*dakou* generation" (*dakou yidai* 打口一代), as suggested by the book *New Sound of Beijing* (*Beijing xinsheng* 北京新声), published in 1999 by Ou Ning 欧宁, Yan Jun 颜峻, and Nie Zheng 聂筝, which is explicitly dedicated to the "*dakou* generation."[1] Since the 1990s, an impressive amount of articles and presentations, books, and interviews have mentioned *dakou* music as a decisive source of inspiration for musicians, writers, or simply music lovers. Scholars and observers, as Jeroen de Kloet and Yan Jun, have forcefully insisted on the importance of *dakou* for the emergence in the 1990s of a new Chinese rock, punk-rock, and underground (*dixia* 地下) music scene following the repression of the early rock scene of the 1980s after the 1989 crackdown on the democratic movement, even if *dakou* tapes were equally important for other music genres – pop, hip-hop, or classical music. Recently, new testimonies have emerged reevaluating the role of *dakou* in the musical education of the generation of young Chinese who grew up in the 1990s. If the effects of *dakou* CDs and tapes on the Chinese music scene of the 1990s have been extensively analyzed, this paper suggests taking into consideration the nostalgic discourses produced by the members of the "*dakou* generation," who recently began to look back on their past musical experiences. These testimonies also allow us to understand how the *dakou* black market was actually organized in the 1990s, a reflection absent from previous studies.

The aim of this paper is to understand how a "rubbish plastic object" is now becoming an object of cult and desire, after having

1. Ou Ning 欧宁, Yan Jun 颜峻, and Nie Zheng 聂筝, *Beijing xinsheng* 北京新声 (New Sound of Beijing), Hunan: Hunan yishu chubanshe, 1999.

embodied the Chinese reform era of the 1990s. To better comprehend the influence of *dakou* tapes and the recent discourses of nostalgia around it, we first have to explain how and when these CDs and tapes appeared, how they were bought and sold, before analyzing more recent discourses and testimonies from the actors of the "*dakou* generation." This paper uses all the resources available to show the multiplication of discourses around the *dakou* phenomenon: books, articles, websites, blogs, or other evidence.

The "D-Generation"

To understand the *dakou* phenomenon, it is necessary to go back to the 1980s and the emergence of one of the first Western-inspired music genres after the Mao's death. Rock and roll (or *yaogun* 摇滚 in Chinese) first appeared in China in the early 1980s, with the formation of the first rock and roll cover bands in Beijing after the beginning of the economic reforms in 1978, such as Wan Li Ma Wang 万里马王 or Bu Dao Weng 不倒翁. But the birth of Chinese rock for the general public dates to May 9, 1986, when the rocker Cui Jian 崔健 sang for the first time on national television the song "Nothing to my name" (*Yi wu suoyou*一无所有, sometimes translated as "Having Nothing") during the charity concert organized at the Beijing Worker's Stadium entitled "Fill the World with Love" (*Rang shijie chongman ai*然世界充满爱). Cui Jian's song, one of the first original rock songs written in Chinese, represented a revolution for Chinese popular music, as it "trivialized the state, ignored most bluntly Maoist prescriptions concerning art, and empowered the individual self, asserting its independent value."[2] Rock and roll flourished in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the rising popularity of rock singers and bands such as He Yong 何勇, Tang Dynasty 唐朝, or Hei Bao 黑豹. The involvement of Cui Jian and He Yong during the Tian'anmen protests led to the tightening of control

2. Nimrod Baranovitch, *China's New Voices: Popular Music, Ethnicity, Gender, and Politics, 1978-1997*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003, p. 32.

by the Communist Party of rock and roll after 1989. Rock and roll was indeed seen as a product of the rebellious youth of the 1980s, "produced and performed in an oppositional subcultural milieu." [3] The crackdown on the democratic movement and the nascent public sphere of the 1980s [4] also meant an official ban on rock music, which acted before 1989, as Andrew F. Jones points out, as "an *alternative* public sphere, whose activities and ideological aims are constituted outside of and in opposition to the mass media (and its hegemonic boundaries)." [5] The continuing popularity of rock in the early 1990s "was also a backlash, a popular expression of anger, defiance, and perhaps a kind of compensation for the failure of the [democratic] movement," [6] and soon Chinese rock faced its first "crisis" to paraphrase Qian Wang, [7] to be replaced by *Gangtai* (港台) pop, popular music from Taiwan and Hong Kong, considered harmless by the authorities. Rock concerts were still organized in small underground "parties" in Beijing, while Cui Jian was forbidden from performing public concerts in the capital until 2007 and had to cancel numerous shows in other cities due to official pressure. Despite the fact that the 1990s initiated a setback for Chinese alternative music, it was also an era of relative cultural openness, backed by the pursuit of the economic reforms after Deng Xiaoping's 鄧小平 "Southern tour" in 1992. In the early 1990s, it was easier for young Chinese to listen to the Hong Kong rock band Beyond through pirated CDs and tapes than to find Cui Jian's albums, as Wu Wei 吴维, the singer of the Wuhan punk band SMZB 生命之饼 recalls:

> The first rock band I listened to was Beyond, not Cui Jian. In the early 1990s in Wuhan 武汉 it was nearly impossible to find Cui

3. Andrew F. Jones, *Like a Knife: Ideology and Genre in Contemporary Chinese Popular Music,* Ithaca: Cornell East Asia Series, 1992, p. 115.
4. See Jean-Philippe Béja, "Regards sur les 'salons' chinois: Embryons de société civile et sphère publique en Chine (1978-1989)," *Revue française de science politique,* 1992, series 42, no. 1, pp. 56-82.
5. Andrew F. Jones, *Like a Knife*, p. 116.
6. Nimrod Baranovitch, *China's New Voices*, p. 36.
7. Qian Wang, *The Crisis of Chinese Rock in the mid-1990s: Weakness in Form or Weakness in Content*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Liverpool, 2007.

> Jian's albums. Once I went to Beijing in 1996 to see a concert, Cui Jian was there. I gave him a demo tape of our band, he was very interested. But when I told him that I never listened to one of his songs, he got angry. The next day, I listened to one of Cui Jian's album, it was really good![8]

In the 1990s, recently developed spaces like cafes and bars organized small screenings of pirated foreign films, fostering a cinephile community that would produce a whole new generation of independent filmmakers and film critics.[9] The rise of piracy in the 1990s gave a name to the generation that grew up with pirated CDs, VCDs, and books: the "D-Generation," "D" standing for *daoban* 盗版 (piracy), digital, and also *dakou*, the object responsible for the revival of the Chinese musical underground of the mid-1990s after its initial crisis. The appearance of *dakou* tapes separated two generation of Chinese rockers; for Jeroen de Kloet, the 1980s was dominated by the *liumang* 流氓 (hooligan) generation, celebrated in the novels of Wang Shuo 王朔 and the songs of Cui Jian, who shared the experience of the Cultural Revolution and Tian'anmen. The D-Generation however was too young to experience the Tian'anmen repression firsthand; they are often described, rightly or wrongly, as more individualistic, having grown up during the reform era. "What is strikingly different between the *liumang* and the *dakou* generation is not only the direct reference to music, but also – and especially – the inclusion of the illegal West in a 'Chinese' concept."[10] As an object, *dakou* refers to the CDs and tapes that were sent as cargo to China from the West in order to be recycled. In the early 1990s, Western record companies began to accumulate a massive quantity of unsold tapes and CDs and decided to send them to China, in theory to use the plastic for street

8. Interview with Wu Wei, Wuhan, March 23, 2013. All the translations from the Chinese are made by the author.
9. See Jinying Li, "From D-Buffs to the D-Generation: Piracy, Cinema, and an Alternative Public Sphere in Urban China," *International Journal of Communication*, 2012, no. 6, pp. 542-563.
10. Jeroen de Kloet, "*Dakou* Culture," in Edward L. Davis (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture*, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 183.

lightning and road surfacing projects.[11] The CDs were cut on the edge "to prevent them from being sold. However, since a CD player reads CDs from the center to the margin, only the last part is lost. *Dakou* CDs enabled musicians and audiences in China to listen to music that was either censored or deemed too marginal by China's music distributors."[12] The cassette tapes were also cut, and sometimes the magnetic tapes were taken out of their cases. Instead of being recycled, however, these *dakou* CDs and tapes were sold on the black market in main Chinese cities at a very reasonable price. *Dakou* CDs were sold for around 5 to 10 yuan each, even if the prices evolved according to historical circumstances. For instance, in 1994, when Kurt Cobain committed suicide, the price of Nirvana *dakou* tapes rose to 80 yuan.[13] The audio quality of the *dakou* products fluctuated from one CD or tape to another. Yan Jun remembers in a text published in 2011 how he managed to repair *dakou* tapes he bought on the black market (see Figure 1). The details provided by Yan Jun and the care he put into the repair of a *dakou* tape reminds one of the way Walter Benjamin speaks about his school books in *Berlin Childhood*[14]:

> I use simple needle-nose pliers, a pair of scissors, and a transparent adhesive roller. The pliers can replace the screwdriver, it also allows prying open the case […]. Once the plastic residues are removed,

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11. Unsold CDs of Robbie Williams' albums are said to have helped pave certain Chinese roads; see "Robbie Williams to pave Chinese roads", *NME*, January 16, 2008, https://www.nme.com/news/music/robbie-williams-88-1338919 (accessed September 30, 2018).
12. Jeroen DE KLOET, "Popular Music and Youth in Urban China: The Dakou Generation," *The China Quarterly*, 2005, p. 617.
13. CHEN Guanzhong 陈冠中, LIAO Weitang 廖伟棠, and YAN Jun 颜峻, *Boximiya Zhongguo* 波西米亚中国 (Bohemian China), Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2004, p. 166.
14. "Its pages bore traces of the fingers that had turned them. The bit of corded fabric that finished off the binding, and that stuck out above and below, was dirty. But it was the spine, above all, that had had things to endure – so much so, that the two halves of the cover slid out of place by themselves, and the edge of the volume formed ridges and terraces." See Walter BENJAMIN, *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, Howard EILAND (trans.), Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2006, p. 59.

> I have to unscrew the tape to clean up the inside […]. *Dakou* CDs cannot be repaired, all you can do is to clean the residues. The idea is that when you buy a CD you have to look carefully to see how deep the cut is. If there is just a small cut, you can listen to the whole CD without any problem, but if the cut is deep, the last song, or even half of the songs, will be lost, you can thus bargain the price or even refuse to buy it.[15]

Figure 1: A *dakou* tape of The Grateful Dead, collection of the author.

Dakou CDs and tapes allowed young people to listen to new kinds of music and to thereby expand their musical education. Famous rock critics, like Hao Fang 郝舫, began their careers by listening to *dakou* CDs, and Hao Fang himself amassed an impressive collection of *dakou* CDs and tapes that he bought throughout the 1990s. In 1996, two years after the suicide of Kurt Cobain, Hao Fang wrote the D-Generation's best-seller and most influential book, *Canlan Niepan: Kete Keben de yisheng* 灿烂涅槃: 柯特柯本的一生 (*The Glorious Nirvana: The life of Kurt Cobain*).[16] This biography in Chinese of Kurt Cobain had a tremendous

15. Yan Jun, *Génération dakou: Écouter, recycler, expérimenter*, Paris: Van Dieren Éditeur, 2012, pp. 29-32.
16. Hao Fang 郝舫, *Canlan Niepan: Kete Keben de yisheng* 灿烂涅槃: 柯特柯本的一生 (The Glorious Nirvana: The life of Kurt Cobain), Beijing: Zhongguo Zhehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 1996.

influence on young Chinese rockers of the 1990s; Yan Jun, for instance, considers that "after the publication in 1996 of *The Glorious Nirvana* by Hao Fang, Nirvana became the spokesperson for the 'underground spirit.'"[17] As a self-taught specialist of the *dakou* market, Hao Fang estimates that a shipment containing 300,000 Madonna albums, which reached the Chinese black market in the 1990s, sold out in a month all across China. The black market was swamped by *dakou*, and one could find any kind of music, from classical music to Celine Dion, Michael Jackson, or more obscure indie rock bands. Some of these CDs and tapes were censored by the Chinese authorities as rock and roll, others were too expensive to be bought by students and young people. Guang Changxin, professor of piano at the China Conservatory of Music, remembers in a documentary why *dakou* CDs were also essential for classical music students in the 1990s:

> At that time, the price of imported music, especially CDs, was more than 100 yuan for one CD, which was much more than I could afford as a student. But the classical *dakou* CDs were much cheaper, between 20 and 30 yuan, which I could save up for. Without *dakou* I would never have the opportunity to hear music like that.[18]

Dakou tapes were bought and used by a very large number of people, from all social backgrounds, and more importantly, the musical genres varied greatly. What is less known and studied is the way *dakou* CDs and tapes were exchanged on the Chinese black market, and who benefited from this form of popular "cultural fever" in the mid-1990s.

Dakou: a Journey From the West

The appearance of *dakou* CDs and tapes in China in the 1990s created new professions, from *dakou* importer to *dakou* middlemen and

17. Yan Jun 颜峻, *Hui fei yan mie: Yigeren de yaogun guancha* 灰飞烟灭: 一个人的摇滚观察 (Scattered ashes and dispersed smoke: A personal observation of Rock and Roll), Guangzhou: Huacheng, 2006, p. 123.
18. Jada Li, *Nirvana and Pulp: A Story of Scrapped CDs*, 2013, https://youtu.be/bn21ywCLQTs (accessed September 22, 2018).

dakou dealers. A vast majority of music store owners today were illegal *dakou* vendors in the 1990s, like Xiao Wei, the owner of the music store C-Rock, located in Guloudong dajie 鼓楼东大街 in Beijing:

> In the 1990s, I sold *dakou* CDs on the streets. They were coming as cargo from Guangdong 广东 province I think. At first the quality of the tapes was not so good, but after some time we could sell even non-scrapped CDs. People were bribing the Customs in Guangdong so they would stop breaking the CDs and tapes. I managed to open my own shop with the money I made selling *dakou* tapes.[19]

In the scholarly works produced on *dakou*, there are few details about the origins of *dakou*, the date of their first appearance, or even the commercialization process of these illegal CDs and tapes. Testimonies published over the past few years have shed a new light on the origins of *dakou* tapes and the way they were distributed throughout the country. Tang Ming 唐明, the owner of the Xi'an 西安 music store EM7, remembers that he first saw *dakou* tapes sold in the street of Xi'an in 1993:

> In 1993, a bunch of Southerners sold *dakou* tapes at the southern gate of the city wall, they were very cheap, but most of them were smashed, it was not possible to play them.[20]

Among all the testimonies, 1993 is one of the earliest dates found for the appearance of *dakou* tapes in Chinese cities.[21] It coincides with Deng Xiaoping's "Southern Tour" in 1992, and the appearance of *dakou* tapes in Guangdong province corresponds to the presence of multiple special economic zones in the area, such as Shenzhen 深圳, Zhuhai 珠海, and Shantou 汕头. In the early 1990s, the quality of *dakou* CDs and tapes, as underlined by Tang Ming, was disastrous. By 1995, a vast

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19. Interview with Xiao Wei, Beijing, March 28, 2011.
20. Chui Zi 锤子, *Zuori buci'erbie* 昨日不辞而别 (Yesterday left without saying goodbye), Xiamen: Lu Jiang chubanshe, 2015, p. 29.
21. Another testimony mentions the year 1991 as the first appearance of *dakou* tapes in Beijing; see "*Xunfang dakou de yidai*" 寻访打口的一代 (Locating the *dakou* generation), August 12, 2005, https://www.douban.com/group/topic/1002172/ (accessed September 30, 2018).

underground market for *dakou* tapes was developed in major Chinese cities, as the people in Guangzhou 广州 and Shantou realized that a lot of money could be made by selling those scrapped CDs and tapes in other provinces. Southern middlemen provided sellers with boxes of *dakou*, most of the time by sending them to local freight stations. As *dakou* tapes were illegal products sold on the black market, the goods were frequently seized by the local authorities if bribes were not paid:

> One shipment arrived at the Xi'an freight station, I don't know who ordered it, but the police seized it and sent it to the Xincheng station. The name and the telephone number of the buyer were inscribed on the shipment's boxes. They phoned the guy, and he had no choice but to go to the police station and pay an expensive fine.[22]

The customs officers were not the only authority the *dakou* sellers had to deal with. When they sold *dakou* on street stalls (*ditan* 地摊), street hawkers often faced the wrath of the local government law enforcement agency (*chengguan* 城管),[23] though the crackdown on *dakou* varied over time: "[T]he most severe *chengguan* period against *dakou* hawkers was up until 1999-2000; at that time, *dakou* tapes had a political character because they were contraband products. From 2000 on, it was not considered as contraband anymore: It became illegal cultural products, it was piracy."[24] *Dakou* sellers had to pay attention to the *chengguan*, but also to thieves, as it was pretty easy to steal tapes displayed on street stalls. Tang Ming remembers how some people managed to steal his *dakou* tapes:

> There was this man, he always carried a briefcase, one day he put down his briefcase on my products and started to chat and ask for the price, after he finished talking he selected two tapes to buy and left. After he left, I realized that a lot of tapes were missing,

22. Chui Zi, *Zuori buci'erbie*, p. 33.
23. See Emmanuel Caron, "Interactions Between *Chengguan* and Street Vendors in Beijing: How the Unpopularity of an Administration Affects Relations with the Public," *China Perspectives*, 2013, no. 1, pp. 17-28.
24. Chui Zi, *Zuori buci'erbie*, p. 47.

> in fact when he was talking to me, he moved some tapes inside his briefcase.[25]

Contrary to many *dakou* resellers, Tang Ming decided to go directly to Guangdong to find the best *dakou* tapes. His quest led him to one of Guangdong's special economic zones, Shantou, where most the *dakou* tapes were stored in warehouses in the countryside, built specially to stock the illegal CDs and tapes. When Tang Ming arrived in Shantou, he searched for *dakou* sellers, and he "immediately realized that they had ties with the local mafia (*hei shehui* 黑社会)," [26] which is consistent with the fact that *dakou* tapes were illegal products, destined to be recycled but ultimately sold all over China without the approval of the authorities. The circulation process of the *dakou* is rather complex and involved different regions and multiple brokers. Tang Ming's testimony reflects the peculiar nature of the *dakou* industry:

> The products were coming from abroad, they were shipped to Hong Kong, and the bosses (*laoban* 老板) from Hong Kong, after selecting what they wanted, sent the rest of the products to the bosses in Shantou. The bosses in Shantou, after receiving the products, declared the shipments to the customs, saying that it was just plastic garbage, and after that they sold them to the lower-level little bosses (*xiao laoban* 小老板). After buying the products, the little bosses sold them to us, raising the price at each level. At the beginning, the foreign shipments arrived in Shantou, and at the time they didn't want any money, they were throwing the products away as trash, they even gave money to the Chinese for that. After they realized that these products could be sold, they began to ask for money, and the gang of bandits on our side gave them money. At first, Beijing and Shanghai were in competition. People from Beijing came and said "I give you two yuan and you give them to me," and the people from Shanghai who knew about it came and said "I add two more yuan and you give them to me instead." With the competition of these two cities, the prices immediately went up […]. At the time the bosses could earn very easily one to two million yuan per year […]. Those who knew how to make money employed people, those who didn't became bosses, and these bosses didn't

25. Ibid., pp. 30-31.
26. Ibid., p. 39.

> know their products, only the distributors were professionals. In Beijing, Shanghai, and even Xi'an, there were people who knew the value of *dakou* tapes, they went there to pick the products for a monthly salary.[27]

As mentioned by Tang Ming, the *dakou* phenomenon created a specific market at the fringe of the legal economy. It created "bosses," "small bosses," resellers, handlers, but also *dakou* specialists, who came all the way from Beijing, Shanghai, or Xi'an to help the "little bosses" choose the best *dakou*, as many of them were "illiterate" according to Tang Ming. Tang Ming's depiction of the *dakou* economy is consistent with other testimonies. For instance, in her doctoral dissertation, Peng Lei interviewed a Beijing based *dakou* seller, Daodao, who also worked in Shantou to find the best tapes:

> I worked for a small boss in Shantou in 1999. Why were they called "small bosses"? Because most of them were at first factory workers in plastic manufactures […]. This business made them rich, they were able to build houses and buy cars. However, they didn't have the musical knowledge to select the best tapes. They needed people like me. The competition was tough; sometimes we fought to get the best tapes. These small bosses sold tapes in boxes. Usually, a box of two to three hundred tapes cost between 300 and 500 yuan. The price of the tape rose to 5 to 20 yuan when you bought it in a music store. But the best tapes, like Nirvana, could reach 50 yuan, or even more. The influence of music magazines had an impact on the cost of the tapes. I remember once my small boss told me that he regretted not knowing Nirvana before. He threw away enough Nirvana albums to buy a house![28]

The development of the internet in the 2000s rendered *dakou* CDs and tapes obsolete, but they didn't disappear. Scrapped CDs coming from the West still reach Chinese ports, but there is less money to be made. This *dakou* CD of the 25th-anniversary edition of *Bad* by Michael

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27. Ibid., pp. 41-42.
28. Peng Lei, *Rock en Chine: contestation et consommation depuis les années 1990*, Doctoral Dissertation, Lyon: Université Jean Moulin, 2014, www.theses.fr/2014LYO30040 (accessed September 25, 2018).

Jackson, released in 2012, shows that *dakou* CDs were still being sold in the 2010s (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: *Dakou* CD of *Bad* by Michael Jackson, collection of the author.

The arrival of musical plastic waste from the West to China indeed created a new market where scrapped CDs and tapes were sold at inexpensive prices, benefiting from the presence of local mafias and black markets which flourished during the reform era. Gradually, thanks to bribes, the illegal CDs and tapes were only partially cut, or even sold unscathed. Most of the testimonies however insist on the nostalgic feeling of the consumers and collectors who discovered a large variety of musical styles thanks to *dakou* tapes in the 1990s.

The Construction of a *Dakou* Narrative in Retrospective Testimonies

In the past few years, novels, testimonies, and interviews centered on the "*dakou* generation" have been published. Well-known musicians or rock critics remember in these testimonies their relationship to *dakou* tapes, building a discursive nostalgia for the 1990s. In the

early 2000s, the reference to *dakou* and pirated CDs was seen as part of young urban Chinese daily life. In her autobiographical novel, first published in 2002, the writer and poetess Chun Shu 春树 remembers going to *dakou* music stores in 1998 Beijing:

> We walked to a music and movie video shop in front of his house's *hutong* [Beijing's traditional narrow alley], there was a lot of Hongkongese pirated rock and roll tapes, five yuan each. But I didn't even have five yuan, we spent half the day rummaging through the piles of music tapes, neither one of us wanted to buy any. Then I said, let's go.[29]

According to Chun Shu's novel, *dakou* was an ordinary product, and it was fairly common for young people to look into piles of *dakou* tapes for hours, even if they had no money to buy them. More recent testimonies convey a more nostalgic and idealized vision of *dakou*. In a book published in 2018 for the tenth anniversary of the Chongqing 重庆 live venue NUT Livehouse, musicians and participants of the Chongqing underground scene recall their first encounter with rock and roll, like Lao Wei 老嵬, the founder of NUT Livehouse:

> In 1997, just before graduation, I formed my first band. It was the warmest era, every day was associated with *dakou*, except from rehearsing, life was just muddling along in universities. Sometimes we went to university dormitories listening to songs, boasting, comparing our musical skills with the band, making friends who had a common goal. Sometimes, we played with our instruments all day long, sometimes we went to another university's dormitory to listen to songs or to brag, and if it was sunny we went singing on the university's lawn, or spying on girls.[30]

Lao Wei's testimony links *dakou* to his life as a university student, his discovery of Western rock and sexuality. An observation shared

29. Chun Shu 春树, *Beijing wawa* 北京娃娃 (Beijing Doll), Hohhot: Yuanfang chubanshe, 2002, p. 17.
30. Zhang Wei 张嵬 and Chen Fu 陈浮, *Ziyou shengzhang* 自由生长 (Growing Freely), Chongqing: Chongqing daxue chubanshe, 2018, p. 4.

by Yang Bo 杨波, a famous rock critic who grew up in Taiyuan 太原, in Shanxi 山西 province:

> It was hard to find *dakou* tapes in Taiyuan, where I lived. So, in order to get certain tapes, I had to save money to take the train to Tianjin 天津 or Beijing; the most distant city I went to was Guangzhou, to try to find a tape. Now I ask myself, why did I want to listen so badly to this stuff? It's because we thought it would give us a new kind of power, it agitated us endlessly, and stimulated the spirit of youth, like a boy who is growing up and becomes aware for the first time of the excitement provided by the body of a girl, it was that kind of feeling. Cui Jian wrote a song where he says "it's like when your 18, and you get a girl"; of course now it's not like in the past, now the kids get a girl at 14 or 15.[31]

In these retrospective testimonies, the discovery of new musical styles provided by the appearance of *dakou* tapes and the discovery of one's own sexuality are intertwined. In other accounts, the writers emphasize the act of buying *dakou* tapes and remember the *dakou* sellers who represented their first contact with *dakou*. Da Sha 大傻, a musician from Chongqing recalls the time when he began to buy *dakou* tapes with his friends in high-school:

> Afterwards, we knew about some places that sold *dakou*, generally they used a box to unload their stuff, squatting on the roadside in order to sell them, very convenient if you had to run from the police. Lao Li from Tian'nan Street was fairly famous in the circle, he wore a shabby jacket, but it is said that at home, he had a stereo worth 10,000 yuan. A tape was worth 5 yuan, a CD 10, at the time, for us, it was not that cheap […]. We were absorbing different kinds of music. Interminable classes, endless schoolwork and impetuous rock and roll were the totality of our eighteen-years-old life.[32]

In Da Sha's testimony, *dakou* is linked to a generational experience of growing up in the 1990s, playing rock and roll *dakou* tapes while doing homework. *Dakou* tapes represent the shared experience of the

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31. Yang Bo 杨波, "*Yaogun jingshen yu women de shidai*" 摇滚精神与我们的时代 (The *Spirit* of rock and our generation), in *Aisixiang*, December 11, 2008,
32. Zhang Wei and Chen Fu, *Ziyou shengzhang*, p. 182.

1990s youth, to the extent that some scholars, such as Liu Chang, use the expression of "post-*dakou* generation" (*hou dakou yidai* 后打口一代) to characterize the generation of Chinese who grew up in the 2000s, who used the internet instead of *dakou* CDs.[33] Ye San 叶三, a famous blogger, recently published a book where she interviews major figures of contemporary Chinese music, from classical to punk-rock music. She also shares her own experience of buying *dakou* tapes as a young university student in Beijing in the 1990s:

> When I was attending university, except classical music, I was listening to everything, I loved everything, the noisier, the dirtier I loved the most. It was still the golden era of *dakou* CDs and tapes. Every week, I skipped class to go to Wudaokou 五道口, befriending *dakou* dealers. They allowed me to get the best goods (*jian'er huo* 尖儿货) first, and after that I helped them fill their boxes of CDs and move them on the streets, screaming in chorus "5 yuan for one CD, 10 yuan for three tapes!"[34]

Like Da Sha, Ye San also recalls her interactions with *dakou* sellers. What is also interesting in her testimony is the use of an expression created specially by *dakou* lovers, *jian'er huo* (尖儿货), which means the most valuable and rare *dakou* tapes, which one could only buy by knowing a *dakou* seller. Ye San also mentions Wudaokou, the famous university neighborhood located in the Haidian 海淀 district of northwestern Beijing, a major center for *dakou* deals in the capital. Wudaokou was indeed famous for its *dakou* street stalls, but also for being the birthplace of Chinese punk-rock, with the creation in 1997 of the Scream Club (*Haojiao julebu* 嚎叫俱乐部) and afterwards the Happy Paradise (*Kaixin leyuan* 开心乐园), two major punk-rock live venues:

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33. Liu Chang, "*Nimen dou shi 'hou dakou yidai': xiegei chengzhang zhong de lingling-hou*" 你们都是'后打口一代': 写给成长中的零零后 (You all are the 'post-*dakou* generation': For those who grew up in the 2000s), in *Xin yinyue chanye guancha* 新音乐产业观察, September 7, 2018, http://www.sohu.com/a/252593915_172553 (accessed September 28,2018).
34. Ye San 叶三, *Women chang* 我们唱 (We sing), Beijing: Tai Hai chubanshe, 2017.

> Since the end of the 1990s, Wudaokou was an important base of Beijing underground rebel culture. The Wudaokou market, new and old rock fans can testify: in 2000 it was covered by the *dakou* market and pirated CDs, and famous for the first punk bar Scream Club. All the now famous bands were hanging around Wudaokou, sometimes selling, sometimes buying CDs, tossing beer bottles, singing and having fun.[35]

Wudaokou in the 1990s was also depicted in the song "Wudaokou 1998" (五道口 1998) by Wang Di 王迪, released in 2011. Wang Di is one of the first Chinese rockers – he was part of the early rock band Bu Dao Weng in the 1980s – but also a real connoisseur of the new punk-rock movement. He was the music producer for the Scream Records (*Haojiao changpian* 嚎叫唱片) label, created by Lü Bo 吕波, the owner of the Scream Club, in order to produce the first Chinese punk and hip-hop bands:

光棍一条啊老头一个晚上 我专上那五道口望望	A bachelor on the street, an old man for a night I'm going for a walk in Wudaokou feeling ashamed
说的是一个三不管的地方 韩国人盖厨房朋克们玩思想	It is said that it is an irresponsible place Koreans set-up kitchens, punks play with ideology
还有 CD 这儿销路旺 可小妹和辣姐在这儿没事扛	And the CD market is flourishing here But young girl and sassy girls have nothing to do here
第一次去那儿我还真紧张	The first time I went there I was really nervous
说那儿不待见老头儿 听说会受伤别憋着别逞强	It is said that there they don't like old people I heard that they wound those who don't feel depressed or who don't brag
哥们你骂谁呢 在这儿生命不发霉	Dude who are you insulting Here life cannot become moldy
隔壁有我暗恋的鬼	Next door there is the ghost I secretly love

35. Chen Guanzhong, Liao Weitang, and Yan Jun, *Boximiya Zhongguo*, pp. 115-116.

这里是天堂但没有太阳	Here it's a paradise but there's no sunlight
这儿的生命没错对 快乐已经无所谓无所谓	Here the life is not bad Happiness is already indifferent
这里有梦想但没有希望	Here there is dream but there's no hope
嚎叫俱乐部开心的地方	The Scream club is a happy place
买件皮衣再来吹个瓶啤 吹没了嚎叫朋克这块宝地	Buy a leather jacket then knock back a bottle of beer There's no more beer, the Scream Club is the punk's treasure

Wang Di 王迪, "*Wudaokou* 1998" 五道口1998 (excerpts),
in *Di tuobang* 迪托帮, Scream Records, 2011.

For Wang Di, Wudaokou is a dangerous but beautiful place. He acknowledges the fact that he is too old to be part of the "*dakou* generation," but he still longs for this era where there was "dream but no hope." In 2011, Wang Di expresses a yearning for Wudaokou in 1998, its *dakou* market, and the punk energy that was deployed there in the late 1990s.

All these testimonies convey a strong nostalgic feeling for *dakou* tapes, but more importantly for the 1990s. A generation of young Chinese called themselves the "*dakou* generation," because the exchange of this "foreign rubbish" (*yang laji* 洋垃圾) was a common feature of a large number of young urban Chinese in the 1990s. *Dakou* represents by itself a golden era idealized by a number of musicians, individuals, and critics of the contemporary underground scene.

The *Dakou* Generation and the Emergence of a Nostalgic Discourse

Nostalgia for *dakou* CDs and tapes is not a recent phenomenon. In 1999, in the midst of the *dakou* fever, a collective book was published by the art curator Ou Ning and the music critics Yan Jun and Nie Zheng

entitled *New Sound of Beijing* (*Beijing Xinsheng* 北京新声).[36] The book is dedicated to the "*dakou* generation," and the first pages display the picture of a *dakou* cassette tape of the opera *Einstein on the Beach* by Phillip Glass side-by-side with a message posted on an internet forum by the anonymous user "Jar of Flyes" (a reference to the 1994 album *Jar of Flies* by the American grunge band Alice In Chains) on October 19, 1998 (see Figure 3):

> We are a bunch of poor young people living in the cities' margins, we have nothing to do, when we are feeling nauseous in our tiny apartment we switch on our double cassette deck […]. [W]e ride our rusty old bicycles, wandering on the *hutong* of our city, to find a *dakou* tape, for a name we don't know well, our two hands are shivering by dint of rummaging through the stalls, our happiness arises when we find in the stack of tapes the rare gem […]. Years have passed, we forgot the mark of *dakou* on our streets. It's an era that we cannot forget – our *dakou* generation.[37]

Figure 3: The first pages of *New Sound of Beijing* with the BBS message from "Jar of Flyes". Ou Ning 欧宁, and others, *Beijing xinsheng* 北京新声, pp. 4-5.

36. See note 1, above.
37. Ou Ning 欧宁, and others, *Beijing xinsheng* 北京新声, p. 4.

This early nostalgia for *dakou* can be explained by the rise of internet and peer-to-peer file exchange at the end of the 1990s in China – the message is itself posted on the internet – but it is also a reaction to the commercialization of rock and roll and underground music at the turn of the 21st century. Two opposite sides of the *dakou* generation are indeed struggling against each other at the end of the 1990s. One side is represented by the music critic Yan Jun, who devoted his life to promoting the underground scene in China, linking the "*dakou* generation" to the rebellious spirit of the 1990s:

> [The *dakou* generation] represents a generation that refuses to be suppressed, that seeks unseeingly, that connects to the underground, that creates marginal culture and lifestyle, that grows stubbornly, that resists and struggles.[38]

The other side is best embodied by Shen Lihui 沈黎晖, the singer of the Britpop band Sober 清醒 and the founder of the label Modern Sky (*Modeng tiankong* 摩登天空) in 1997. As expressed by Jeroen de Kloet, "the new (*dakou*) generation on the other hand is said to reflect contemporary urban life: don't take it so seriously, have fun; who cares to rebel if you can revel."[39] Modern Sky officially published the albums of some members of the "Beijing New Sound Movement" (*Beijing xinsheng* 北京新声), "a new generation of musicians who are described as being financially independent because of their job qualification or a well-off family background,"[40] bands such as New Pants 新裤子, The Fly 苍蝇, or Catcher in the Rye 麦田守望者 – thanks to the good relations maintained by Shen Lihui and certain communist officials. Shen Lihui himself is an aggressive critic of the old rock generation of the 1980s, which he finds overly political and boring, as he stated in an interview: "If you are not satisfied with the present situation, then go and die! [...] One irresponsible shouter is leading a group of headless shouters, this is today's situation of Chinese rock music. At present, the irresponsible shouter has already turned into

38. Chen Guanzhong, and others, *Boximiya Zhongguo*, p. 176.
39. Jeroen de Kloet, "Popular Music and Youth in Urban China," p. 619.
40. Andreas Steen, "Sound, Protest and Business: Modern Sky Co. and the New Ideology of Chinese Rock," in *Berliner China-Hefte*, 2000, no. 19, p. 2.

an old chattering woman […]. I think, he or they should go into the museum and get some sleep!"[41] In this excerpt, Shen Lihui targets the rocker Cui Jian, who is compared to an "old chattering woman" and should be in a museum. Shen Lihui actively participated to the popularization and marketization of a culture that was until then considered "underground," which coincides with Nimrod Baranovitch's own observations: "[I]n the 1990s in particular it became increasingly difficult and often impossible to determine what or who was official and what or who was unofficial."[42] The enmity between Shen Lihui and Yan Jun is also very well known; the latter referred to Modern Sky as "Modern Hell" (*Modeng diyu* 摩登地狱) in an issue of the music magazine *Freedom Music* (*Ziyou yinyue* 自由音乐) in 1999.

Yan Jun is probably the most ferocious critic of the marketization of Chinese rock since 1997 and the creation of Modern Sky, but also the most nostalgic writer when it comes to *dakou*. Yan Jun grew up in Lanzhou 兰州, the capital of Gansu 甘肃, where he witnessed the emergence of the underground music scene. He wrote scene reports on the nascent Lanzhou music scene for local newspapers, and eventually published articles in the Beijing music magazine *Music Life* (*Yinyue shenghuo* 音乐生活), where Hao Fang worked.[43] He also founded the music fanzine and label Sub Jam in 1998, where he wrote extensively on alternative bands outside of Beijing, and contributed to the Guangzhou based magazines *Punk Generation* (*Pengke shidai* 朋克时代) with Yang Bo, *Heyday of Rock and Roll* (*Shengshi yaogun* 盛世摇滚), and *Freedom Music*, from 1998 to 2000. Since the mid-2000s, Yan Jun has stated repeatedly the disappearance of the *dakou* generation in his writings:

> *Dakou* generation is disappearing. China is changing, youth is getting old, the market is spreading itself. Wild thoughts, commitment,

41. Ibid., p. 17.
42. Nimrod Baranovitch, *China's New Voices*, p. 7.
43. See Josh Feola, "100 Flowers: Yan Jun The godfather of Chinese experimental music" in *Tiny Mix Tapes*, August 16, 2012, online: https://www.tinymixtapes.com/column/100-flowers-yan-jun (accessed September 29, 2018).

> poesy and even suicidal tendencies have been put away by wealth accumulation.[44]

If, according to him, the *dakou* generation died when the market invaded the underground scene, Yan Jun continues nonetheless to reflect on his youth and participate in the construction of a discursive memory of the *dakou* phenomenon in countless articles:

> The youth that grew up listening to *dakou* are the "*dakou* generation'," they were forbidden from connecting to the vast cultural world […], their knowledge and enjoyment were incomplete. In fact, the cultural maturity of the "Saw-gash generation" is also incomplete. *Dakou* brought up Chinese rock, it also enriched the value system of those who diverge from the mainstream and disregard the norms, which limit youth culture. In 10 years, maybe one or ten million – it's impossible to have exact statistics – of saw-gash tapes or CDs were transformed from plastic waste to musical best-sellers.[45]

Of course, Yan Jun's testimony is inaccurate, *dakou* CDs and tapes hadn't "brought up Chinese rock"; it existed since the 1980s and already "enriched the value system of those who diverge from the mainstream," as noted by Andrew Jones or Qian Wang. However, it provided young Chinese of the 1990s with a large selection of Western rock music censored by the authorities, and it allowed them to re-create rock communities, which were subjected to a larger crackdown on popular cultural expression since 1989. Yan Jun's texts all convey a strong feeling of nostalgia typical of older generations – in the West or in China – who tend to idealize their own past experiences. As mentioned above, the rock generation of the 1980s who fancied themselves as the "*liumang* generation" looked down on the "*dakou* generation" for their lack of political engagement – even if Wang Shuo, the symbol of the *liumang* generation, "became very much associated with officialdom" in the 1990s.[46] Members of the "*dakou* generation" themselves seem to despise the new generation for their individualistic spirit and the

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44. YAN Jun 颜峻, *Ranshao zaoyin* 燃烧的噪音 (Burning Noise), Jiangsu: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2004, p. 174.
45. CHEN Guanzhong, LIAO Weitang, and YAN Jun, *Boximiya Zhongguo*, p. 166.
46. Nimrod BARANOVITCH, *China's New Voices*, p. 8.

commodification of rock and roll – which started during the *dakou* era with Modern Sky. But writings are not the only aspect of Yan Jun's involvement with *dakou* nostalgia. This music critic and experimental musician has also one of the most impressive collections of *dakou* CDs and tapes alongside Hao Fang's own collection. He recently began to get rid of some of his *dakou* tapes, but before throwing them out, he digitized some of them and uploaded them on his bandcamp website.[47] Questioned by Josh Feola on his view of the current Chinese music scene compared to the *dakou* era, Yan Jun replied that:

> I was not a musician during the *dakou* time. I always searched for all kinds of music. I don't think now music and info is easier to get than before, because what you call music is different from the streaming data where you try one bite then throw it away. Today's situation is lacking in desire. And music is about how you want the world, and want it now.[48]

Yan Jun gives a new life to his *dakou* by putting them on the internet, creating a digital memory of this era. It is also a statement on the superiority of *dakou* serendipity over the immediate access to all kinds of music on the internet. During the *dakou* era, Yan Jun had to rummage through piles of *dakou*, and frequently buy an unknown album from an unknown artist. Nostalgia also manifests itself through a new consumption of second-hand *dakou* sold on the internet. Some rare tapes are sold for a high price, such as a *dakou* cassette tape of *War* by U2 listed on Taobao 淘宝 at 1,000 yuan. *Dakou* tapes are becoming objects for collectors, reminding them of a happier and simpler era. The music critic Qiu Dali 邱大立 states that he continues to buy physical CDs because of his relation to *dakou*. When asked what he truly wants in life, he responds that "all I want is inside *dakou* tapes […]. I want a life free from affectation and a completely unbridled

47. See Yan Jun's bandcamp page: https://radio-enemy.bandcamp.com/ (accessed on September 29, 2018).
48. Josh Feola, "Radio Enemy: Experimental Musician Yan Jun Digs Into His *Dakou* Collection," in *Radii China*, April 5, 2018, https://radiichina.com/radio-enemy-experimental-musician-yan-jun-digs-into-his-dakou-collection/ (accessed on September 29, 2018).

freedom."[49] The *dakou* collector, embodied by Yan Jun or Hao Fang, is also an historian of a recent past who keeps the memory of this era intact. As Walter Benjamin put it, "[E]very passion borders on chaos, but the passion of the collector borders on the chaos of memory."[50] The purpose of the *dakou* collector is to free *dakou* tapes from their usefulness or commodity values, in order to perpetuate the memory of the era they represent:

> To [the collector] falls the Sisyphean task of divesting things of their commodity character by taking possession of them. But he bestows on them only connoisseur value, rather than use value. The collector dreams his way not only into a distant or bygone world but also into a better one – one in which, to be sure, human beings are no better provided with what they need than in the everyday world, but in which things are freed from the drudgery of being useful.[51]

Nostalgia can often be seen as a reactionary project, a longing for an idealized past that probably never existed. In the case of *dakou* nostalgia, this reference to a recent past is a way to criticize the present state of the Chinese music scene, blamed for its over-marketization. Nostalgia can thus be seen as progressive, as Frederic Jameson puts it: "[I]f nostalgia as a political motivation is most frequently associated with fascism, there is no reason why a nostalgia conscious of itself, a lucid and remorseless dissatisfaction with the present on the grounds of some remembered plenitude, cannot furnish as adequate a revolutionary stimulus as any other."[52] References to *dakou* can thus also be mobilized by political motives, and function as a warning against official repression. In a recent article entitled "Are we going to stop seeing foreign bands' performances?" in the Chinese version of *Q Magazine*, the journalist Wu Ying 武攖 warns Chinese music lovers

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49. *70/80 Zhongguo xin renlei* 70/80 中國新人類 (New Chinese human beings from the 70/80s), Hong Kong: Sanlian Shudian, 2008, p. 22.
50. Quoted in Frederic Jameson, "Walter Benjamin, or Nostalgia," *Salmagundi*, 1970, nos. 10-11, p. 54.
51. Walter Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935-1938*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2002, p. 39.
52. Frederic Jameson, "Walter Benjamin, or Nostalgia," p. 68.

about the difficulties encountered by foreign indie bands performing in China: "Is the *dakou* era coming back, I don't know. But an era where we can't see foreign bands performing is maybe ahead of us."[53] Here, the reference to *dakou* allows Wu Ying to criticize the current crackdown on rock music by the Chinese authorities targeting foreign rock bands: Will it lead to a period without any foreign bands performing, as in the 1990s, when music lovers had to buy *dakou* CDs on the black market, Western music being either censored or too expensive?

Conclusion

The *dakou* generation is definitely not a unified generation, it includes young Chinese who in the 1990s encountered Western alternative music, which eventually led to the emergence of a "new sound," but also classical music lovers and pop music fans. It helped produce an underground music scene, highlighted in the writings of Yan Jun, but it also allowed more business-minded individuals, as Shen Lihui, to release mainstream rock albums in the late 1990s.

Recently published testimonies have shown the complexity of the *dakou* market since 1992 and the pursuit of economic reforms. The exchange of *dakou* tapes throughout China created new jobs and opportunities for workers in Shantou with the help of "secret societies" at the margins of legality. Consumption of *dakou* tapes in major Chinese cities – with notable exceptions, such as Xinjiang 新疆 province, where the black market was saturated with cassettes and VCDs from Turkey or Kirgizstan[54] – created a common experience that led to the formation of the "*dakou* generation."

With the development of the internet and new modalities of music consumption, *dakou* has disappeared from the streets of Chinese cities,

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53. Wu Ying 武攖, "Women shibushi zai ye kanbudao waiguo yuedui de yanchu le?" 我们是不是再也看不到外国乐队的演出了? (Are we going to stop seeing foreign bands' performances?), *Q Magazine*, January 2019. Note that this article is now censored on the Chinese internet.
54. See Rachel Harris, "Reggae on the Silk Road: The Globalisation of Uyghur Pop," *The China Quarterly*, 2005, no. 183, pp. 627-643.

but the memory of this era is still alive in various testimonies, which all insist on the importance of *dakou*. Nostalgia for the *dakou* era, frequently considered as a period of intense creativity outside the scope of marketization, also manifests itself through a new craving for this outdated object, which collectors now buy on the internet at a rather expensive price. But as we have seen, this nostalgia and the figure of the *dakou* collector is first and foremost a symbol of the dissatisfaction with the present and a longing for a better time, when foreign music was illegal but sold everywhere, and when the music market was virtually non-existent but new bands were thriving throughout the country. This nostalgic point of view is mostly aimed at the marketization of Chinese rock and the co-option of certain bands by the Chinese state in TV shows such as "China's Top Band" (*Zhongguo yuedui* 中国乐队). But this nostalgic discourse also neglects contemporary underground practices and strategies adopted by rock, punk, or hip-hop bands in order to circumvent censorship. In the post-*dakou* era, new bands keep emerging, making and sharing music, and more importantly finding spaces to perform outside the scope of the authorities.