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Cultural Conflict and Continuity: From Religious to Economic Performances

Paper

**Cultural War of Identity Politics in Postwar Taiwan:
Performance of Techno God Nezha as a Form of Resistance**

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This is a draft paper only for the conference discussion!

Introduction

Cultural war or conflict in postwar Taiwan has been widely identified as the fighting' or debate over Chinese identity versus Taiwanese identity. Chinese religious tradition and Taiwanese local performance are pinpointed as a major front. The Kuomintang (KMT) lost the civil war to Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and retreated to Taiwan in 1949. It has since imposed its version of Chinese culture upon people in Taiwan while Taiwanese culture was banned. Taiwan has since the late 1980s undergone a transition from an authoritarian rule to democracy. The democratisation gave the rights to native politicians of Taiwan and who established the major opposition party, i.e., the Democratic Progressive Party (the DPP), in 1986. The DDP has since promoted Taiwanization with an emphasis on Taiwan's native or local culture. This paper explores the war of cultural discourses between Chinese and Taiwanese identities with a focus on a new discourse of Taiwanese identity as a form of resistance against Chinese identity in the case of the performance of the Techno Third Prince Nezha ('Dian-yin San-tai-zi Nezha', 電音三太子哪吒).

In this paper, I argue that local religion actually reflects the politics of identity and nationalist narrations in democratic Taiwan, serving as a vehicle in displaying Taiwan's subjectivity and delivering Taiwanese nationalist discourses. In the first section, I begin to introduce Taiwan's history and then focus on the cultural war in postwar Taiwan. I illustrate how the KMT reinvented Chinese cultural

renaissance in contrast to that how the DDP constructed Taiwanese cultural identity. In the second section, I move on to explore a case study, investigating how the local cult of god Nezha has acted as a vehicle in the construction of Taiwanese nationalism and cultural identity. I analyse how Taiwan's youth have adopted Chinese mythical Nezha icon while they have also modernised its performance as to express the subjectivity of Taiwan. In the conclusion, I argue that Chinese traditional culture is not in war or conflict per se with Taiwanese cultural identity but actually served as a cultural element to form a Taiwanese identity and subjectivity.

Cultural War between Chinese versus Taiwanese identities

Up until the early seventeenth century, Taiwan was inhabited almost exclusively by Austronesian-speaking peoples, consisting of more than twenty ethno-linguistic groups (Shepherd 1993: 31). The situation in Taiwan began to change from the seventeenth century. Dutch colonizers occupied Taiwan's south from 1624–1662 while Spanish colonized the north during 1626–1642. The Dutch were expelled by Cheng-Gong Zheng 鄭成功 (known in the west as Koxinga 國姓爺), a Han Chinese merchant and pirate who was opposed to the Qing Man Dynasty that had displaced the Ming Han Dynasty in China. Under Koxinga's successors Taiwan remained independent from Qing Dynasty authority until 1683, but afterwards Taiwan was under Qing rule between 1683 and 1895. Qing's rule of Taiwan could be seen as a colony-cum-province, or as an aspect of what Vivienne Shue calls the pre-modern 'honeycomb polity' of the Qing Empire (Shue 1988: 89). The Qing itself was not a nation in the modern sense, and it only ruled Taiwan to a very limited extent. Over more than two hundred years of Qing administration, many Chinese immigrants made their homes in Taiwan and became nativized, including members of the Confucian gentry created by the *keju* (科舉) examination system, and this class became mediators between the Qing Empire and Taiwan's localities.

Since the Ming Cheng (明鄭) followed by Man Qing (滿清), large numbers of Han Chinese immigrants from the southeast coast had settled on the island. The majority came originally from the localities of Quanzhou 泉州, Zhangzhou 漳州, or Hakka 客家, and they brought the Hakka language and the Quanzhou and Zhangzhou dialects of Hoklo 福佬話, as well as cultural variations in cuisine, dress, kinship, and religious icons and practices. This variety has been described as 'ethnic group' (族群). These Han Chinese ethnic groups have gradually become the majority in Taiwan, occupied more than 95 per cent of the whole population.

Following defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Man Qing Empire ceded Taiwan to Japan, in accordance with the Treaty of Shimonoseki. Taiwan had since under Japanese colonial rule for 50 years been transformed into a modern society. However, neither Man Qing administration nor Japanese colonization, succeeded in imposing their nationalisms on the peoples of Taiwan. Nor did Taiwanese people develop nationalism into a substantial movement during the Qing and Japanese periods. Nevertheless, Japanese colonialism was based on an allegedly biological discourse of race (Weiner 1994: 27), which thereby distinguished 'the Self' from 'the Other' by differentiating the colonizer 'Self' from the colonized 'Other'. It was this representation of Otherness that made people in Taiwan conceive of themselves as a distinctive ethnic and cultural group for the first time (Shih 2012: 9–10).

It was not until the KMT's restoration of its ROC vision of Chinese nationalism in Taiwan that Taiwan did not experience a cultural nationalism imposed thoroughly. One year before the KMT's relocated on the island in 1946, officials who were sent to survey Taiwan claimed that Taiwanese people had been 'enslaved' (奴化, *nuhua*) as the outcome of fifty years of colonization by Japan (C. Chen 2002 in F.-C. Wang 2005: 59). The 1946 claim of 'enslavement' resulted in the implement of the re-Sinicization policy, indicating that the *benshengren* should not be treated as equals with *waishengren* until they had been de-Japanized and re-Sinicized (C. Chen 2002 in F.-C. Wang 2005: 59). A distinction was thus made between *benshengren* (本省人, 'provincial natives', or 'Taiwanese') and *waishengren* (外省人, 'provincial outsiders', or 'mainlanders'). *Benshengren* meant those peoples who had arrived previously and were seen as the residents of Taiwan province, mainly Hoklo, Hakka, and indigenous Austronesian inhabitants; in contrast, *waishengren* referred to those Chinese who came to Taiwan with the KMT after 1947 from various provinces other than Taiwan, but who were united in a common interest as a ruling class with Chinese identity (Corcuff 2002: 170).

The KMT campaigned for de-Japanization during the 1950s which banned the formerly official Japanese language from use in school and media. Also, the Japanese governance was presented as a disgraceful page in Taiwan's history. The KMT's 're-Sinicization' erased the past of Taiwan and turned the island into a frozen imaginary of the pre-Communist Republican mainland, both politically and culturally (Shih 2012: 12–13). Moreover, as opposed to the Cultural Revolution, the KMT launched Chinese Cultural Renaissance (中華文化復興運動) in 1966 as a form of resistance to the CCP. By appealing to 'tradition', the KMT authorities proposed to revive some elements of the past of China, but they were undoubtedly reinventing tradition with their selection. They in effect took an active role as author in rewriting culture of Taiwan by constructing discourses on their versions of Chinese tradition, Chinese identity, and Chinese philosophy and ways of life.

These reconstructed notions of 'Chinese tradition as Taiwan's culture' were disseminated through the normative machinery of the school, media, family and workplace in order to cultivate disciplinary lifestyles and ritualized patterns of behaviour compatible with the underlying essence of the state of ROC. As Allen Chun indicates: "Chinese culture ultimately became an object of discourse not only in a political sense but also through the construction of knowledge..." (Chun 1994: 54). As a result, Chinese Mandarin has become the national language (國語); Traditional Chinese characters have been retained as the legal written form; The chronicling of Chinese history and the geography of Qing's territory were taught at the school; Beijing operas, Mountain-water paintings (山水畫), and archaeological treasure of China were sponsored and promoted in the national hall, gallery, and Palace Museum.

Indeed, the KMT's re-construction of Chinese culture and renaissance of Chinese tradition had roots in the politics of its ROC continuous survival in Taiwan. These cultural policies and discourses evolved over the three decades (from 1950s to 1970s) into an all-encompassing essence to the level of everyday routine and for the self-identity of individual people. As Chun has pointed out, "the crisis of culture in postwar Taiwan was one which was predicated by the government's attempt to nationalize Chinese culture (by making the latter a metaphor or allegory of that imagined community called the nation-state) where no such culture (of the nation) previously existed" (1994: 54).

In contrast, Taiwan's native and local languages (e.g. aboriginal languages, Hoklo, Hakka etc) were banned; Taiwan's history and geography were reduced as part of China; and Taiwan's local culture

such as Taiwanese opera, glove puppetry, and religious practices were undermined. The authoritarian KMT and its resinicization were considered no less 'foreign' than previous Japanese colonial rule. Taiwan has since the Japanese governance followed by the KMT's rule been struggling for its representation and subjectivity.

Taiwan underwent a transition from authoritarianism to democracy in the late 1980s. Democratization brought about Taiwanization. Taiwanization of the polity was led by then President Lee Tenghui (1988–2000) who abolished the National Assembly in 1991, and formed a parliamentary body with a Taiwan-based electorate (Rigger 1991: 156–162). The major opposition DPP has since found been holding a strong stance on human rights, self-determination, and Taiwanese identity as a form of resistance to the authoritarian KMT and its Chinese tradition and renaissance. The issue of national identity was often used by both political parties to appeal to their supporters in election campaigns. As a result, we see democratic Taiwan has been divided into two camps: the pro-MKT Blue camp with Chinese identity versus the pro- DPP Green camp with Taiwanese identity.

Taiwanese nationalism emerged in the 1990s has been understood and categorized as a type of anti-colonial nationalism which is against the KMT's 'colonial' rule and sinicization. Nations are imagined and national communities are (re)-invented (Anderson 1983). The nationalism of this type is normally having its imagining deriving from its creative transformation of the traditions of heritage and community existed before the colonial rule. The task of this typological nationalism is often to show the continuity over the history of a particular people with a distinct culture, known as 'cultural nationalism' (see Hutchinson 2013).

Cultural nationalism always aims to construct its national cultural policy and discourses. Taiwanese nationalism brought about Taiwanization with an emphasis on Taiwan-based culture on the one hand, and on the other, it demands for desinicization. Desinicization resulted in the replacement of the word and content of 'China' and 'Chinese' to those of 'Taiwan' and 'Taiwanese'. In 2003, the DDP government abolished the longstanding policy of Mandarin as the sole language of government, and instead promoted the language used by Hoklo Taiwanese who occupied 75% of the whole population. In 2007, 'Zhonghua Post (China Post)' was renamed as 'Taiwan Post'. The textbook created history and geography of Taiwan which are separate from history and geography of China. Among these revival, what is most striking is that Taiwan's local religious practices and performances are even more thriving and growing vigorously. To sum up, Taiwanization has been centred around Taiwan's subjectivity (主體) to rewrite Taiwan's language, history, museum, nationhood, education, and religion (Shih, Thompson, and Tremlett 2009).

Techno Nezha Performance and Taiwan's Subjectivity

In my article 'Religion as a Vehicle in the Formulation of Nationalism in Postwar Taiwan', I first describe how Taiwan's sense of being a nation has been built up by island-wide pilgrimages relating to goddess Mazu during the 1980s–1990s, but I later demonstrate that a shift has since 2008 occurred from the pilgrimage of goddess Mazu to the spectacle of god Nezha. This was complicated by political-economic circumstance; President Ma Ying-jeou has since taking office in 2008 prioritised the establishment of closer ties with rising and powerful China, and in his 2011 New Year's address, stating "Building up Taiwan, Invigorating Chinese Heritage", which stressed "Chinese culture and virtues, such as

benevolence, righteousness, filial devotion, respect for teachers, kindness, and simplicity". However, President Ma's policies and strategies have worried Taiwan's citizens, in particular, young people, about losing Taiwan's autonomy and subjectivity. The unruly god Nezha in 'zhen-tou' (陣頭) performance has thus instead been picked up by Taiwan's youth in an attempt to bring invisible Taiwan to the international stage to display Taiwan's subjectivity.

'Zhentou' has been a long-standing tradition in temple processions in Taiwan's history, referring to 'the front troupe of a religious procession'. It normally takes place in great ceremonies of renewal (作醮), on god/dess' birthday, or in a more abridged form, at pilgrimage sites, on 'inspection tours' (遶境 *rao-jing*), in ritual greetings at the deity's temples visited. *Zhen-tou* is of dramatic and performative elements in the procession in which the actors dress up, or in a giant puppet to portray a figure or display a story in an attempt to entertain the divine and at the same time to make the viewers enjoyable. The highlight of *zhen-tou* performances are often seen today in the yard of the temple visited, involving marching, dancing, singing, martial arts and going into trance or a state of possession by spirits. *Zhen-tou* could be seen as ritual in which "forms and content are stereotyped, repetitive, condensed, and conventionalized" as well as drama as "a form of deep play.....in which both [performers] and [viewers] say something about themselves" (Sutton 1990: 535).

The role that Nezha often plays in the procession is to lead the way; that is, a junior deity paving the way for the more senior deities. Nezha is a god in Chinese mythology who is well-known as and identified with the divinity 'The Third Prince' (三太子 *San-tai-zi*), in reference to his status as the third son of the divine General Li Jing (李靖). He has normally been depicted as a clever but playful boy, holding the Cosmic Ring (乾坤圈 *qian-kun-juan*) in one hand and the Wind Fire Wheel (風火輪 *feng-huo-lun*) under one foot. Nezha is one of the most popular deities in local temples (地方廟) in Taiwan and also in private family shrines (私祠 *si-tan*). It is believed that these special objects enable Nezha to move very fast and almost fly (Lee 2009: 35–57). Nezha has always been considered as a patron deity for drivers, and his image are often seen in the vehicles of professional drivers of tourist coaches, trucks, taxis and buses. The drivers prefer to carry a small statue of Nezha in their vehicles to ensure a safe and smooth journey. There is also widespread belief in Nezha's power to protect the community and its people, in particular, children. In addition, Nezha is normally positioned at the centre of the altar, and is thus also known as 'Marshal of the Centre of the Altar' (中壇元帥 *Zhong-tan Yuan-shuai*), commanding the five military camps (*wu-ying*): the camp of the North, of the South, of the East, of the West, and of the Centre (Lee 2003). This is signified by the five flags in five different colours carried behind Nezha while on tour.

In agricultural era of Taiwan, religious troupes were formed by adult villagers who gathered to do rehearsals after sunset or after the harvest. However, with the industrialization in the late 1970s, troupe members dramatically declined in number and the majority of troupe members were elderly unfit men. Temples have instead tended to recruit dropouts from school to their troupes, or they have recruited from the ranks of the young unemployed. In doing so, the temples provide them with social links to their communities and with opportunities to develop discipline and skills. Nevertheless, these young performers, like other young people, often go to discotheques and nightclubs, and so they have incorporated elements from the nightclubs they love into the Nezha troupes in which they are trained to perform.

As a result, the Nezha troupe has undergone a transformation: while wearing giant Nezha body puppets in traditional costumes, and retaining certain rigid gestures and moves associated with the god Nezha during the performance, the young performers add an element of modern fashion by wearing sunglasses and dancing to techno music and disco beats. This modernized form has been known as 'Dian-yin San-tai-zi Nezha', namely 'the Techno Third Prince Nezha'. I argue that although young '*zhentou*' performers may take their performance for granted and might even be unconscious of its meaning, the performance itself is still a vehicle for continuing cultural traditions as well as for transforming religious identities. Indeed, such activities and performances also provide resources to negotiate wider processes of socio-political change and create opportunities for socio-cultural re-invention. The creative process of re-inventing traditions, as Allio notes, 'occurs particularly when a rapid transformation of society is taking place; the real stake for social agents then becomes the formalization of the new traditions, as well as their integration and their reproduction' (Allio 2008: 486).

Remarkably, Nezha the Third Prince, a godly figure derived from local temple rituals and processions, has captured the imagination of Taiwan's youth since President Ma elected. Nezha has been brought out onto the national and international stage as a popular-culture icon representing the national spirit of Taiwan. No other deity has earned as much enthusiasm from the youth in Taiwan in the digital era as has Nezha the Third Prince. This is perhaps because the seven-year-old god Nezha could be approached directly by even the most naughty or rebellious young follower. Or, this is perhaps because of the unruly nature of Nezha: today many young people in Taiwan identify themselves with him – an unruly god, in contrast to other deities who are upright but distant – especially when they feel frustrated at being treated unjustly (Dai 2012).

Since 2005, various performances by Nezha troupes have been seen at events other than temple processions in Taiwan, such as at wedding celebrations, corporate banquets and political campaigns. It was reported that there were over a hundred Nezha troupes of various sizes across Taiwan; among them, 20 groups were better known, such as the Jiu-tian Folk Arts group (Jiu-tian min-su ji-yi-tuan 九天民俗演藝團) and the Nezha Troupe Theatre in Luzhou in Taipei (Luzhou Nazha jufang 蘆洲哪吒劇坊) (Jennie 2012). It is interesting to note that the Luzhou Nezha Troupe Association was founded by Gao Chih-hung (高志宏), as he did not want to see the local troupe culture with which he had grown up recently being mis-presented and downgraded associated with gangster culture (Chang 2014).

The turning point in Nezha's popularity was a performance at the opening ceremony of the 2009 World Games in Kaohsiung. About 20 giant Nezha body puppets roared into the stadium on motorcycles and proceeded to dazzle the audience. Since then, Techno Nezha the Third Prince troupes with body puppets have frequently been invited to perform at various international events, such as the 2009 Deaf Olympics in Taipei, the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai and the 2010 International Flower Expo in Taipei, and the 2017 Summer Universiade in Taipei. Moreover, in January 2010, a performance in the United States was awarded the first prize in an international competition at the Pasadena Rose Parade. In August 2010, eleven members of Taiwan's marathon team took turns running a super marathon through the Sahara Desert dressed in Nezha body puppets. They did so in an attempt to publicize Taiwan during the week-long event. Also, in July 2012, while attending a cross-Strait exchange programme, President of the PRC Hu Jintao accepted an invitation to join a performance and was seen dancing with Nezha body puppets (Jennie 2012).

From February 2011 to the end of 2013, Wu Chien-heng (吳建衡), a student in his early twenties who was studying Sports Management at the National Taipei University, performed in a giant Nezha body puppet weighing 14 kg during visits to over 60 countries, including India, Egypt, Kenya, Peru, Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, the United States and the United Kingdom (Want China Times 2012a). It is interesting to note part of his travel cost was funded by Bei-gang Zhao-tian Mazu Temple (北港朝天宮) which can be read as a support in the formulation of a new Taiwanese identity with a different concern. During his performances, he played techno music and also danced to disco beats in the giant body puppet. Noteworthy to mention is that he also replaced the five flags representing the five directions with ROC national flags that were decorated with LED lights.

Publicity around Nezha reached its high point during the period of the London Olympic Games in the summer of 2012. Wu, wearing his giant Nezha body puppet, participated in a demonstration of 300 overseas Taiwanese (most of them studying in the United Kingdom) who carried Taiwan's ROC flag through central London. The highlight of the event was a street-dancing activity in Regent Street, where for a few days Taiwan's ROC flag had hung alongside the flags of the 206 other countries participating in the Olympic Games. Unfortunately, after a week Taiwan's national flag had been removed at the PRC's demand and replaced by the Chinese Taipei Olympic flag. Together with the campaigners, Wu, wearing his Nezha body puppet, made a very visible effort to bring Taiwan's national flag back to Regent Street, even if only during a temporary street-dancing performance (Want China Times 2012b).

Photos of Wu's performances of the Nezha dance decked out with ROC national flags, taken while on his global tour, have been posted on social-media sites such as Facebook and Youtube. The images show him surrounded by groups of local people of various cultural backgrounds in foreign cities or villages all over the world. According to an article posted to the website 'Taiwan Insights', which is run by the press division of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in San Francisco, Wu explained that people from many parts of the world 'have no idea what Taiwan is', and therefore he chose this way to present Taiwan. He also said that 'those local residents and international tourists in each country would never have dreamt of meeting the Third Prince god Nezha from Taiwan during their life journey'. Wu further encourages young people 'to choose their own way to show their love of Taiwan' (Jennie 2012). The final comments of the article read as follows:

Like many in Taiwan, Wu feels frustrated with the island's diplomatic isolation; however, his creative thinking has helped the national flag to be seen on the international arena once again. Nezha the Third Prince, a mythical teenage hero, represents a symbol of youth, bravery, agility and freedom from conventional bondage, a perfect mascot for grassroots diplomacy engaged by Wu (Jennie 2012).

Also, in an interview, Gao Chih-hung said that, after his performance of the Nezha dance, he overheard the responses from foreign audiences, expressing sentiments such as: 'Wow, I never knew there was a place called Taiwan. This performance was fantastic and made me really want to visit that country' (Chang 2014).

It is understandable that young people like Gao Chih-hung and Wu Chien-heng desire and seek global visibility and recognition for Taiwan: in the new era of social-media technologies, the younger generation expects equal rights to visibility and hence equal access to the international world. Indeed, the right to visibility and global communication is increasingly becoming a significant issue with new meanings. However, these new notions of the capabilities for visibility and communication through

travel or social media are not simply absolute, but are rather relative and contested – in particular, they are related to the emerging global new order (Urry 2007: 209). In the case of Taiwan, due to the PRC's intervention, the island is not recognized as a nation by the United Nations or indeed by most countries. Taiwan has thus been restricted in its 'rights' to visibility and to recognition in international relations. At the same time though, young Taiwanese individually have global civic rights and exercise their freedom to travel globally, to perform, demonstrate, and to communicate with other global citizens as well as to use social media. As such, the global tour of the Techno Nezha performance is conducted as an expression of the notion of what Mimi Sheller and John Urry call the 'civic freedom and mobility' (Urry 2006: 208) to elaborate and extend the capabilities of communication and visibility. Through this, young performers hope that global citizens living at a distance can 'see' and 'touch' Nezha, who is coming from Taiwan and represents Taiwan, and thus give recognition to the existence of Taiwan.

The Techno Nezha performance, to use an analysis borrowed from Urry, is a dynamic notion of global citizenship that values 'freedom to' rather than 'freedom from' (Urry 2007: 208). The growth of the Nezha tour, both nationally and internationally, has created significant opportunities to make the presence of Taiwan (in the symbol of the national flag) recognized in the international world, and thus to express Taiwan's right to visibility; by the end of 2013, the number of countries visited by Wu was greater than are being reached by any Taiwan's diplomacy. Also, videos of the Techno Nezha performance have attracted the attention of several hundreds of thousands of social media users. *Want China Times* reported that Wu Chien-heng 'has earned himself a reputation as a cultural ambassador for Taiwan, as he always dances with the ROC flag' (Want China Times 2012a).

The increasing global nature of Nezha performance tours has elevated Nezha to become a new vehicle for Taiwanese identity. Accordingly, if we want to understand this new form of Taiwanese nationalism, we need to understand the desire for autonomy and subjectivity as manifested in the myth of Nezha and the solution of his conflict with his father. Nezha has long been depicted as a young god with massive energy and a rebellious personality: the basis of cultic worship of Nezha is a sixteenth-century epic entitled *Fengshen Yanyi* (封神演義 *The Investiture of the Gods*) (Wa 1992: 248–251). As Sangren notes, the longstanding and widespread popularity of this epic has played a significant role in sustaining elements of Chinese mythology in the popular understanding of Nezha in contemporary Taiwan. The story has been translated and summarised by Sangren:

[Nezha] is a divinely conceived trickster who defies both his earthly father and heaven. As a seven-year old, he playfully provokes a confrontation with the dragon king of the oceans, killing one of the dragon king's sons. To escape divine punishment for his insubordination, he returns his flesh and bones to his father, a suicidal act explicitly intended to abolish his filial obligations (Sangren 2000: 198).

This first episode sets up the unruly character of Nezha and further leads to numerous attempts by the father to control his unruly boy.

Desiring a new body, his spirit appears to his mother in her dreams and convinces her to defy her husband and secretly to erect a temple altar to him. Because the temple is so efficacious, never failing to respond to worshippers' requests, it attracts increasing numbers of pilgrims. Eventually, however, [Nezha's] father, Li Jing, discovers the temple's existence and destroys it and its image of [Nezha] (Sangren 2000: 198).

The story here, as Sangren observes, 'has obvious Oedipal overtones – the son's patricidal hatred, the father's murderous intentions towards his son, and the rivalry between them for the affection of the wife/mother' (Sangren 1993: 25–28). Though, unlike Oedipus, Nezha doesn't accidentally kill his father, and marries his mother.

But, because [Nezha's] soul had received nourishment from pilgrims' offerings and incense, his *yang* (material) body escapes total annihilation. With the aid of his Daoist immortal mentor, Taiyi Zhenren ..., [Nezha's] material body is restored with even more stupendous powers. In a vengeful rage, [Nezha] attempts to kill Li Jing, and subsequently must be restrained by Taiyi Zhenren. Thus tamed, [Nezha] goes on in the epic to become a supernaturally gifted hero in Jiang Ziya's ... righteous campaign against the evil emperor Zhou ..., last of the Shang (Sangren 2000: 198).

Following Sangren, I am going to apply a key aspect of Freud's psychoanalytic theory to interpret the new discourse of Taiwanese nationalism conveyed by the Techno Third Prince Nezha. I would agree with the conventional criticism that Freudian analysis, emerging historically in the context of Western family institutions, is not easily transferable to the Chinese family system. However, many scholars have applied Freudian theories to non-Western cultures, such as to Trobriand Islanders in the Pacific studied by Bronislaw Malinowski (1955) and to Sri Lankan culture observed by Gananath Obeyesekere (1990). Like Malinowski and Obeyesekere, I have been fascinated by Freudian Oedipal theory, the importance of sexuality and dominance in human life and the whole overarching concept of unconscious motivation. However, I take Freudian approach further but modify it to apply to the Chinese family situation.

Hereafter, I attempt to make explicit that what is more general to Freudian analysis in terms of the 'Oedipal situation' are the processes of defining self-awareness and producing self-assertion rather than desire for sexual involvement with the parent of the opposite sex and therefore rivalry with the parent of the same sex. In Nezha's case, his self-mutilation/suicide is carried out to save his father, whose interests and desires are clearly represented as being at odds with his own. Although it is true that Nezha goes to some effort to represent his action as a son as compatible with the norms of filial piety, the fact remains that he is led to such self-mutilation/suicide by unresolvable conflict with his father (Sangren 2000: 222–223). Such sentiments or resentments are, however, unconscious and substantially part and parcel of what it means to be a Chinese son or father. This has been elaborated by Sangren:

Overt expression of such sentiments, largely inexpressible in other contexts of Chinese existence, no doubt accounts in part for the popularity of the story. In other words, the story's longstanding and widespread popularity may be attributed in part to the expression it provides for otherwise strongly repressed emotions (Sangren 1993: 10).

It has always been an issue in the Chinese family, in which fathers have strong patriarchal authority: is a Chinese young man to be his own agent or subject, or the instrument or object of his father? The Nezha story embodies the desire and struggle of a young Chinese man to produce and define his own subjectivity while facing his father's authority. Interestingly, while the techno Nezha giant performance is gaining popularity, Nezha's attempt to establish his subjectivity and recognition suggests an analogy with Taiwan's relations to mainland China. The Techno Nezha giant has thus been identified as unruly Taiwan, and Nezha's conflict with his father as embodying the conflict of Taiwan with mainland China. It has been widely said among young Taiwanese that the Nezha giant represents

them and the techno performance stands out as a new vehicle for their expression of Taiwan's subjectivity, and as such Taiwanese nationalism is developing into a new phase with a new emphasis in a new discourse.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the cultural war of the politics of identity between the pro-KMT Chinese identity and the pro-DPP Taiwanese identity in postwar Taiwan. I have further elaborated the relationship between the formulation of a modern state and the application of reinvented traditional religion, which has echoed what van der Veer describes as "modern transformations of pre-modern traditions and identities" (van der Veer 2013: 657). Actually, it does not form a monolithic cultural entity, but rather a discourse in which different voices in dialogue on the social construction of political identity.

I argue that local religion actually reflects the politics of identity and nationalist narrations in democratic Taiwan, serving as a vehicle in displaying Taiwan's subjectivity and delivering Taiwanese nationalist discourses. In the first section, I begin to introduce Taiwan's history and then focus on the cultural war in postwar Taiwan. I illustrate how the KMT reinvented Chinese cultural renaissance in contrast to that how the DDP constructed Taiwanese cultural identity. In the second section, I move on to explore a case study, investigating how local cult of god Nezha has acted as a vehicle in the construction of Taiwanese nationalism and cultural identity. I analyse how Taiwan's youth have adopted Chinese mythical Nezha icon while they have also modernised its performance as to express the subjectivity of Taiwan. In the conclusion, I argue that Chinese traditional culture is not in war or conflict per se with Taiwanese cultural identity but actually served as a cultural element to form a Taiwanese identity and subjectivity.

Indeed, traditional religion and religious performance have usually been brought in for the construction of imagined communities, and many elements of local religion have provided the cultural sources used in Taiwanese nationalist imaginings. Among them, the most popular resources is '*zhen-tou*' while the most extensive performance centres around the figure of god Nezha. I argue that the spectacle of Techno Nezha troupe has become a new vehicle in the formulation of a new discourse on Taiwanese nationalism with a concern of Taiwan's subjectivity and autonomy. I conclude that the new Taiwanese identity derived from god Nezha troupe has been constructed through symbolic struggle: the performance of the unruly god Nezha has been identified with unruly Taiwan, and Nezha's attempt to establish his subjectivity from his father is an analogy with Taiwan's struggle to build its own identity and subjectivity.

In addition, I also argue that traditional figure Nezha and the spectacle of his modernized troupe attempt to demonstrate the continuity over the four hundred years Taiwan's history of a particular people (so-called Taiwanese) with a distinct Hoklo language (so-called *taiyu* 台語) and an unique religious culture (so-called Taiwan *minjian Xinyang* 台灣民間信仰). I conclude that the performance of Techno Nezha giant on national and international tours could be seen as a cultural nationalist

movement which has produced a visualized and mobile but assertive Taiwanese identity and subjectivity in a digital and mobile technology era.

The new technologies and their use as mediators have led to the development of a new phase of Taiwanese cultural identity. In particular, the techno performance of god Nezha is promoting Taiwanese subjectivity and autonomy by supporting the creation of imagined relationships between people who have never met, mediated by new technologies and social media but using a traditional pre-modern religious symbol as a new vehicle for the construction of a modern-state. Inspired by the mythic figure of Nezha, I argue that the performance in the new technology era expresses and gives form to the affective aspect of the Chinese family system and, consequently, comprises an important constitutive element within which a Chinese subjectivity is produced. I further argue that this new vehicle – the Techno Nezha giant for Taiwanese identity in the digital era – demonstrates the Freudian displacement by the younger generation of conflict or ‘war’ from the political realm to that of culture. The ‘choice’ of Nezha would have suggested that culturally Taiwanese youth are simply not concerned with voluntary unification with mainland China, but are instead interested in a symbolic exploration of a conflict that they have come to see as inevitable and unresolvable between Taiwan and China.

Nezha performers, at a national level, attempt to revive Taiwan’s cultural pride, and to inculcate habits of self-assertion. By recovering their physical strength and demonstrating their autonomy and subjectivity, they make themselves capable of resisting the PRC domination: a parallel with Nezha’s conflict with his father. According to Freud, the struggle for power and conflict with the father is not an aberration, but is rather the precondition to human being. The problem is not conflict as such, but how to ensure that the energies of conflict do not spill out into actual violence and war and are instead constructively contained and directed towards the production of symbolic capital in the 21st century’s culture wars.

Nevertheless, if it might be entertained that I have gone too far in my reading of the Techno Nezha performance and demonstration, consider the significance of a repressed desire and an unconscious choice by young people in Taiwan to work with that the unruly god and not goddess Mazu 媽祖 (signifying a unified pan-Taiwanese-ness) or some other divinity. Surely, the fact that Nezha is the god they have been selected, consciously or otherwise, is of significance and points not just to religious facts or cultural facts, but to political realities as well.

Finally, I argue that more than any other deity, god Nezha has come to stand for a socio-cultural identity in a digital and mobile technology era, which has to certain degree expressed the desire of Taiwan’s youth of diverse ethnic groups and localities. This is what has since the 2010s been viewed as independent Taiwanese identity and subjectivity, which is actually based on the shared mythology and history of Chinese civilization. I come to a final conclusion that Chinese cultural tradition is not in war or conflict per se with Taiwanese cultural identity but indeed served as a cultural element to form a Taiwanese identity and subjectivity.

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