

The 60th annual conference American Association for Chinese Studies
University of Maryland School of Law, Baltimore

Panel 3C, October 6, 2018

**Taiwan's Civil Society Developing over the Last Sixty Years:
Analysing from perspectives of religion, environmentalism, and student movements**

PAPER

**Civil Society and Religious Functions in Taiwan:
Anti-nuclear Goddess Mazu and Techno God Nezha in the consolidation of
sustainability movements**

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Abstract

This paper examines Taiwan's civil society in relation to religion. Religion has long served as a resource of strength and resistance in Taiwan in both pre- and post-democratic periods. This paper explores how religion functions as a form of empowerment in the sustain of civic campaigns, and in particular, looks at two supernatural forces and inspirations. First, I explore the so-called "anti-nuclear power goddess Mazu" and her prediction of the destiny of Taiwan's Fourth Nuclear Power Plant. I denote that Mazu's prediction has been interplayed between dis-belief and belief as a strategy of empowerment in the consolidation of the anti-nuclear protests. Second, I investigate the so-called "Techno Third Prince god Nezha" and troupe performance of him. I argue that Techno Nezha's performance has been interplayed between Chinese mythology and Taiwanese practice as a strategy of resistance against unification and China's rule, and further demonstration of Taiwan's subjectivity. In the end, I conclude that Taiwan has since transition to democracy thrived diverse civic campaigns for various issues. Most campaigns gain support from particular political parties or organisations. Once campaigners feel being betrayed by politicians or being denied their subjectivity, religion has always become an alternative resource which is accessible by local campaigners to generate the power needed for the sustain of civic protests. Religion is therefore one of the preferred and most effective apparatus in the enhancement of civil society force.

Profile

Fang-Long Shih is Co-Director of Taiwan Research Programme at London School of Economics and Political Science, and specialises in the anthropology of Chinese religions with a focus on the issues of the family, gender, civil society, and transitional justice. Dr Shih also serves on the Board of Advisors, Global Taiwan Institute, Washington DC, and on the Board of Directors of the American Association for Chinese Studies. Her publications include *Gazetteer of Local Religion in I-Lan County* (2003), *Re-Writing Culture in Taiwan* (co-editor, 2009). She contributed chapters for textbooks on 'Women, religions, and feminisms' for the *New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion* (2010), and on 'Reading Gender and Religion in East Asia: family formations and cultural transformations' for the *Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia* (2014). She is currently working on a forthcoming edited volume on *Civil Society in the Chinese Worlds in the Last Sixty Years Development*.

Introduction

Taiwan has since the late 1980s transition to democracy thrived diverse civic campaigns for various concerns and diverse issues. Religion in Taiwan has played a significant role in the enhancing of civic force and the developing of sustainable civil society. Religion has served as a resource of strength and resistance for local Taiwanese people in the civic movements of their interests. It is significant to note that the term 'religion' is native to Western culture, but not to Taiwanese culture. Religion in Taiwan is deeply embedded within society. It is not so much a matter of individuals or belief as it is of practice and *ling* 靈, the power of efficacy possessed by spirits and gods/goddesses. These deities are typically anthropomorphic in form and identified as the spirits of former human beings who lived notable lives (Shih 2010: 237). Moreover, religion in social movements is not obviously all about religious beliefs, doctrines and teachings. Instead, many of the religious symbols and metaphors are often utilized to sustain the civic campaigns. Sustainability is a strategy of cultural adaptation to the dynamic interplay between ecological and socio-political systems, in other words, how to make such survival strategies meaningful.

Religion actually functions as a tool of many different features within the sustainability movements. Religion is normally understood and adopted by the certain group of people in their own places to describe their thoughts and practices revealing something about what they hold sacred and meaningful. When religious figures and metaphors are employed for the sustainable civil society, they usually demonstrate individual identity as well as stand for community identity. Thus, religious dimensions are highlighted in the new understanding of sustainability. As Lucas Johnston says, "sustainability and religion can be a sort of productive social therapy" (Johnston 2013: 7).

This paper is to examine how religion functions in the context of sustainability and sustainable civil society. Drawing on my training as a social anthropologist of religion, I will specifically investigate how religious figures and rituals in Taiwan have been adopted, adapted, and redeployed by local people with few resources of their own as a resource of empowerment in the civic movements of their concerns. I will provide two case studies exploring two supernatural forces and inspirations; they are: 'anti-nuclear-power goddess Mazu' and 'Techno Third Prince god Nezha'. My analysis of these two cases will focus not on supposed internal subjective states (such as beliefs, doctrines), but on the effects that these beliefs, values, and practices have in the real world. Precisely speaking, my focus will be on their actions, and their self-reported thoughts and values rather than on evaluating a priori assumptions.

In the first section, I explore the so-called 'anti-nuclear power goddess Mazu' and her prediction of the destiny of Taiwan's Fourth Nuclear Power Plant. I denote that Mazu's prediction has been interplayed between dis-belief and belief as a strategy of empowerment in the consolidation of the anti-nuclear protests and the sustainable community. In the second, I investigate the so-called 'Techno Third Prince god Nezha' and the troupe performance of him. I argue that Techno Nezha's performance has been interplayed between Chinese mythology and Taiwanese practice as a strategy of resistance against unification with China, and further in the consolidation of Taiwanese subjectivity. Finally, I come to the conclusion that religion in these two case studies is strategically, intellectually, and socially useful in their civic campaigning respectively for the sustainable community and the sustainable subjectivity. Religion has acted as a non-essentialist, multi-factorial category and as a therapeutic concept within the sustainability movements for the sustainable civil society.

Goddess Mazu and Anti-nuclear Power Protests

The first ethnographic example examined here relates to the *ling* of the 'anti-nuclear power goddess Mazu' 反核媽祖 in Ren-he Temple 仁和宮 and her relationship with the anti-nuclear power campaign. Ren-he Temple is situated adjacent to the site of Taiwan's fourth nuclear power plant, which is located on the northeast coast of Taiwan at a place known to local people as Yanliao 鹽寮 in Gongliao District 貢寮區. This nuclear plant has only recently been completed after three decades of controversy. By contrast, Mazu, as goddess of the sea, has been the patron deity of the people of Gongliao for almost 200 years. Gongliao neighborhood is patterned mainly by fishing networks, which have further affected the cultural construction of Mazu worship: the goddess is asked for aid when fishermen are lost at sea or at times of similar distress. Ren-he Temple was built in 1821, and its continuous expansion implies that Mazu's *ling* has been efficacious in responding to the requests of individual villagers as well as the community as a whole (Ren-he Temple Management Co Committee 2004). In recent years, the people of Gongliao have looked to Mazu's *ling* to empower their campaign against the fourth nuclear power plant. My field research was conducted in and around Ren-he Temple in the autumn of 2010 and in the summers of 2011 and 2012.

Following the end of martial law in Taiwan in 1987, pro- and anti-nuclear campaigning was consolidated along political party lines: the ruling Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) favored nuclear power, while the new opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), opposed to it. The Yanliao Anti-Nuclear Self-defense Association 鹽寮反核自救會, created in 1988, worked closely with the DPP in a way that mutually empowered their political ambitions. However, after achieving presidential office in 2000, the DPP reneged on its electoral promise to shut down work on the plant, citing economic and legal reasons and the extreme expense that would be involved. This resulted in the end of what might in retrospect be identified as the first stage of the Gongliao anti-nuclear campaign (1988–2000), described by Ming-Sho Ho (2003: 683) as a "party-dependent movement." After the KMT returned to presidential office in 2008, construction on the fourth plant was speeded up, and the work was completed in early 2010.

At the time of my first visit in 2010, the Gongliao anti-nuclear campaign had come back to life after almost a decade of inaction. Through my interviews I could tell that, over the previous 10 years, discussions of the anti-nuclear issue had turned to the DPP's perceived manipulation of the situation. Local people felt to various extents that they had been deceived or even betrayed by the DPP during its control of the presidency (2000–2008), and consequently they had become demoralized. Additionally, construction work had by this time been completed. It was difficult for Gongliao people to revive their campaign after the harmful political developments of 2000, and they were now campaigning without support from any of Taiwan's political parties. I discovered that an alternative resource was being accessed by the local people to generate the power they needed—that is, their local goddess, Mazu of Ren-he Temple. In fact, Mazu had played a role in the anti-nuclear campaign from the very beginning, but it was not until its recent revival that she came to the forefront of the struggle (Shih 2012).

Six days after the launch of the Yanliao Anti-Nuclear Self-defense Association, members and villagers assembled in the yard of the Ren-he Temple to consolidate their campaign. However, prior to this assembly, the Association's committee, which was uncertain about the future of their anti-nuclear campaign, sent the three most senior members, who were also the most senior members of the Temple's committee, to consult the goddess Mazu. On behalf of the whole community, Mr. Wu Tian-fu, who was in his eighties, together with two assistants in their seventies, communicated with Mazu by casting *poē* 卜筮, also known as divination by using 'moon blocks'.

These divination blocks are cut into the shape of a crescent moon, rounded on one side and flat at on the other. The procedure is explained in notices displayed at various temples: the

diviner should hold out the blocks and raise them up to his or her forehead. He or she should make a proposition and then drop the blocks onto the floor. At the same time, the diviner should ask the deity for confirmation of the statement, saying, "If this is correct, please give me a *siu-poe* 顯筊." *Sui-poe* (affirmative *poe*) is one at side down and one rounded side up, and it is taken to indicate agreement. The two other possible combinations are regarded as disconfirmations, although one is more emphatic than the other. If both blocks land at side down, their lack of movement is understood to mean that the deity strongly disagrees with the proposition, and this position is called *im-poe* 陰筊 (disaffirmative *poe*). If both blocks land rounded side down, the way that they rock on the floor before coming to rest means that the deity is giving an equivocal answer because the statement was unclear, and this position is called *chhio-poe* 笑筊 (laughing *poe*). As such, the last two positions leave room for ambiguity in interpreting disagreement and thus are not taken very seriously. The process of casting the blocks therefore continues until a proposition is formulated that the deity will confirm as being the correct statement of point of view (see also Jordan 1972).

The story I was told about the prediction that was made in 1988 can be summarized as follows:

The first question that Mr. Wu Tian-fu asked was whether construction of the fourth plant would not be completed. This question did not receive an affirmative response for several castings. Mr. Wu then asked if the fourth plant *would* be built, and this time he obtained three affirmative responses. When this occurred, the committee members were dumbfounded, but Mr. Wu, who was very experienced in this kind of situation, then rephrased the question by asking whether the fourth plant would come into operation to generate electricity. This time, he did not receive an affirmative response for several castings. He then put the question in a different way, asking whether the plant would *not* be able to generate electricity. This time, he obtained three affirmative responses (Compiled from several interviews; my translation).

The three committee members involved had passed away before my fieldwork started, and so I instead interviewed Mr. Wu Wen-tong, who later became the head of the Association during the decade of the DPP's administration. At the time of the divination, he was outside in the Temple's yard. He recalled that at the moment when Mr. Wu Tian-fu first announced Mazu's indication that the plant would be built, they were all shocked and subdued. However, when they further heard that the fourth plant at Gongliao would never be operated to generate electricity, they were relieved and became excited. Mr. Wu Wen-tong emphasized that at this time they did not take Mazu's indication as the basis for their campaign, and, after a few moments of excitement, they then moved on, as planned, to burn a truckload of free calendars in front of the main statue of the goddess Mazu. These calendars had been given out by the Taiwan Power Company, which was in charge of the construction of the fourth plant. This ritual burning was a public vow by the people of Gongliao that they would not be bribed by any agency with an interest in nuclear power.

It is interesting to note that the relationship of the campaigners to Mazu is not one of conforming to a religious authority, as is assumed in the New Atheist understanding of religion (Dawkins 2006: 27). Rather, the divination process of question and answer was a kind of playful back and forth between 'no' and 'yes', between disbelief/doubt and belief. Through this process, they were able to get the goddess to confirm an outcome that they wanted to believe in, while simultaneously believing that the fall of the *poe* was governed by the goddess's will. Whenever they received an answer they did not want, they experienced dismay and were reluctant to believe the goddess's prediction, and so they tried again and again by rephrasing the question until they received proof of the 'yes' confirmation they needed. In the 1988 divination, Mazu seemed to be indicating that the fourth plant at Gongliao would eventually be built, but that it would never be operated to generate electricity. Although this prediction offered encouragement, at that early stage it was not particularly relevant to the campaign, which had

set stopping construction as its target and was working closely with the DPP to achieve this aim. Although at the time the campaign relied more on the political power of the opposition party, the goddess remained a part of it. For example, every year since the Association was founded, its members have participated in the annual Mazu pilgrimage, carrying a collection box that invariably receives enough donations to keep up the campaign during the coming year. The people of Gongliao say that the money raised is due to Mazu's blessing.

Furthermore, statues of the goddess Mazu have several times been carried by people from Gongliao around Taiwan as part of their demonstrations. One incident in particular is most often recalled among campaigners. This is the story of an event that occurred on 21 June 1993, during the KMT administration, when a statue of Mazu was brought by protestors from Ren-he Temple to the government's Parliament. The protestors broke through a police cordon, forced open the iron entrance gate, and made their way to the Parliament hall. Here, the statue was placed on a chair behind the speaker, so that the goddess could monitor the parliamentarians as they discussed increasing the budget for the fourth plant. The vote was disputed by the protestors and DPP parliamentarians and was nullified.

However, the KMT later rescheduled the vote, and the funding for the fourth plant was subsequently passed on 10 July. Interviewees during my field research emphasized that the budget had passed because the goddess was not present. They further stated that it was the goddess's *ling* that got them through the police cordon and the iron gate and that had initially nullified the vote. It is worth noting in this context the importance of the public demonstration of Mazu's *ling* in the reassertion of her power.

At that time, the anti-nuclear power movement remained reliant on the DPP for support, and it went into decline when the DPP failed to halt construction of the fourth plant in 2000. In 2010, however, local people began to recall the first part of the prediction made in 1988, namely, that the fourth plant would eventually be built. This is the situation that is now being faced: the plant has been built, and once the safety tests have been completed, it could be operational. Technicians have been performing preliminary tests, resulting in a string of minor accidents, such as flooding, a fire, a power cut (see Guan and Mo 2010), and even a small explosion. Moreover, in March 2011, the Fukushima earthquake, tsunami, and consequent nuclear disaster took place in Japan. In particular, the Fukushima nuclear disaster reinvigorated Taiwan's antinuclear movement, more than anywhere else in the world. The immediate consequence was that the DPP Tsai Ing-wen promised that, if elected, it will terminate the nuclear program (Ho 2014, Grano 2015). Indeed, these events contributed to a sense of anxiety about the safety of nuclear power and prompted a revival of the campaign to prevent the fourth plant from becoming operational. Many more campaigners have since begun to recall the second part of Mazu's prediction—that the fourth plant will never be operated to generate electricity. This is the hope and belief that is then being consolidated and spread via the revived campaign. The post-2010 recall of the 1988 prediction suggests that Mazu's power—her *ling*—was recognized only once the social and political dimensions of her prediction had shifted. In contrast to the model of belief adopted by New Atheist discourse, belief in Mazu's prediction— or indeed disbelief or doubt about it—has emerged from social circumstances rather than from supposed internal subjective states, i.e., the mental acts of individual persons.

People in Gongliao are now turning back to the power of their patron goddess, thus recalling her words and *ling* as a resource to sustain their protest (Shih 2012). It is worth noting that a further dimension to this is the rumor and gossip recently circulating in the Gongliao community and within the plant itself. The examples of this that I collected can be productively treated as local discourses. I was told that technicians at the plant were themselves now aware of Mazu's prediction and were becoming increasingly anxious that they would never be able to get the plant operational. It is reported that the excessive delays in the construction have

meant that some of the parts needed are now out-of-date or have been discontinued, that some of the senior nuclear scientists involved in the project have retired or even died, and that ongoing tests have one after another failed or revealed additional problems.

Mr. Wu Wen-tong told me that he had recently been selected as a representative of the community and, in that role, had had a number of meetings with technicians inside the plant that had been organized by the Taiwan Power Company to demonstrate its purported safety and benefits. He said that the meetings had been tense and polarized. However, he added that, during the breaks, he had twice been approached by a couple of technicians asking whether Mazu had really predicted that the plant would never become operational. These technicians had also asked whether this had been predicted just one or two years previously, and he had replied that it had in fact been predicted more than 24 years ago. Given that most of the plant workers and technicians are not local to the area, Mr. Wu speculated that when temporary local workers at the plant saw the problems revealed or caused by the tests, they may have been prompted to blurt out, "Our goddess Mazu has already predicted this." He later discovered that other members of the community had been asked the same questions by plant workers and technicians.

Rather than representing the two worlds of religious belief and scientific doubt as existing in opposition, in the local discourse of Gongliao, as expressed through gossip and rumor, science and religion are not opposed, and doubt and belief co-exist within religious practice. Local gossip and rumor suggest that some technicians have lost confidence in the plant and that they have begun to doubt their ability to make it operational.

Some of them have even apparently turned to Mazu's *ling* and are taking note of her prediction about the fate of the nuclear plant. Although the technicians are scientists and non-local, they were born into and interact socially within the religious culture in which Mazu's *ling* is recognized. Their concern about the timing of Mazu's prediction implies that if the prediction had been made in the past two or three years, it could be interpreted as having been made up by locals after observing the failure of the recent tests. However, because the prediction was made more than 24 years ago, it is more believable. Actually, the fourth nuclear power plant is currently mothballed under President Tsai's administration. This is further due to massive protests, a hunger strike, and the consideration of the risks of explosion.

Techno Nezha Performance and Taiwan's Subjectivity

The second ethnographic example examined here relates to the mythology of god Nezha and the spectacle of performance of him. The emergence of 'Techno Third Prince god Nezha' 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, traditional religious theatrical troupes) performance has thus 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 in Taiwan and also in private family shrines. 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 (五營 *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 ‘*zhen-tou*’ 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 Nezha 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 under Mayor Chen Chu's administration. 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 subjectivity, 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 太乙真人..., [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 identity 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 identity is developing into a new phase with a new emphasis in a new discourse.

Conclusion

Learning from the cases of goddess Mazu and god Nezha, we have understood that local Taiwanese have adapted 'religion' to reflect their own core values and deep beliefs for their own ends. Religion for them is neither an essentialist category nor a self-evident set of phenomena, and yet it is a term that carries tremendous social and political imports. It is manifested in the case of goddess Mazu: while *ling* does indeed imply a particular idea of reality, it is rarely if ever discussed in this way. *Ling* or efficacious power is instead recognized through its social dimensions, because power is always about social relationships and it is through relationships that power articulates and circulates.

The evidence I have offered suggests that belief and doubt belong as much to social worlds as to individual, mental acts. Historical and ethnographic evidence points to an understanding of religion (or science) not as the private contemplation of ontological claims but rather as embodied, performed, and socialized patterns of interaction in which doubt and belief are constituted through historically situated socio-cultural structures of dialogic interaction. It is only as a result of careful and astute materialist analysis of such structured complexes that the real resonances of religious belief and doubt can be found.

In the case of god Nezha, the relationship between the formulation of a modern sense of subjectivity and the application of reinvented traditional religion has echoed what van der Veer describes as "modern transformations of pre-modern traditions and identities" (van der Veer 2013: 657). 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 resource 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 sense of subjectivity. 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 (signifying a unified pan-Taiwanese) 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.

Furthermore, 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 element 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.

Finally, as a whole, we have seen close relationships between religion and sustainable subjectivity and society. Within the sustainability movements, the religious dimensions have helped to focus desire, forge community, and further facilitate civil society. Religion is therefore one of the preferred and most effective apparatus in the enhancement of civil society force. Most campaigns gain support from particular political parties or organisations. Once campaigners feel being betrayed by politicians or being denied their subjectivity, religion has always become an alternative resource which is accessible by local campaigners to generate the power needed for the sustain of their civic protests.

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