

*The New Style of Hybridity in Global Fluids - Two Cases of Studies of Both Techno
Nezha and Old Master Q Puppet Theater*

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Abstract

The rapid flow of internet information has resulted to a McDonaldization phenomenon in the cultures of various countries. In our society today, people use various media tools to communicate with each other, and they tend to incorporate their culture in one way or another during their expressions. This has led to a superficial homogeneity in their cultures, but a new hybrid form of traditional culture is observed in the core. This research has employed two examples of traditional Taiwanese culture to elaborate on this phenomenon: 1. The new style of Traditional Taiwan puppet theater. Wang, Ying-Chun created Old Master Q Puppet. 2. The new style of marshal Nezha, the Taiwanese folklore God. The Nezha parade in combination with techno, and decorated with white gloves and sunglasses, even on motorcycles. Modern communication symbols are incorporated into these traditional cultures and the superficial global cultural homogeneity is worrisome as everyone is focused on the identical movie characters, cartoons, and even brands – this is becoming a new culture phenomenon.

Keywords: Hybridity, Techno Nezha, Old Master Q

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Introduction

As global culture and values continue to flow relentlessly through the internet, in addition to the globalization of the cultural industries and marketing of IT products and food chain stores using a standard set of SOPs, the society today is receiving an identical set of media symbols on a frequent basis and traditional culture is now challenged by a cultural hybridity phenomenon.

In Taiwan, Marshal Nezha is highly respected by the people and puppetry is a traditional art that is very popular in the nation. What is the impact of globalization on these traditional cultures? How will the change in the traditional culture attract the public? And what is the inspiration derived from this form of cultural hybridity and the impacts on global homogeneity and cultural diversity?

Marshal Nezha – an important God in Taiwanese folklore

Nezha(哪吒) is one of the most important Gods in Taiwanese folklore and he is known by many different names. Amongst all the names, Marshal Nezha is the most well known. According to the Chinese folklore “Investiture of the Gods”, Nezha is a reincarnation of a spiritual pearl and his birth was said to be in a form of a flesh ball after 3 years of pregnancy, carried by his mother. His father dissected the flesh ball upon its birth and Nezha popped out from the flesh ball with red lights glowing from his body and cheeks. Nezha was said to be wearing a golden bangle and a piece of scarlet silk around his belly during his birth and he also had golden rays that would shoot from his eyes.

One day when Nezha was seven, he was washing his magical scarlet silk in the Eastern Sea when his actions alarmed the army of the dragon palace. The dragon lord commanded Yaksha to confront Nezha together with his third prince but they were defeated by Nezha’s golden bangle in a blink of an eye. The death of the prince angered the dragon lord and news was delivered to the Jade emperor. The Jade emperor ordered the capture of Nezha’s family but rebellious Nezha refused to comply and he ended up committing suicide on the spot. Taiyi Zhenren later used a lotus flower to revive Nezha and Nezha was then appointed as a God ever since then.

The story of Nezha’s battle with the dragon lord of the Eastern Sea is very popular among the Chinese, and furthermore Nezha is also known



as the marshal of the Taoism Gods due to his courage and unmatched skills. Nezha is therefore worshipped by the people as “Marshal Nezha” in order to commemorate his heroic acts. Marshal Nezha’s worshipers are mainly warriors but Nezha is regarded as the guardian of infants (Nezha’s child image) and worshiped by the logistics industry (the image of Nezha riding a hot wheel) for protection in modern Chinese culture. The transportation companies have currently enshrined Nezha for the office or at home in order to pray for a successful career and good fortune.

The Nezha parade in combination with techno

When the people turned Nezha into the marshal of the Gods, his appearance in a form of a child was used during the different parade dances as the reconnoiter of the march.

Techno was introduced into the Yanshui fireworks parade in 2005 and has since then gained lots of popularity in the country and has been used at many large events in modern Taiwan. The “Din Tao” performance was made known to the world only in 2009 during the World Games organized in Kaohsiung. 40 different Nezha costumes appeared during the World Games in shades and white gloves and on motorcycles during the opening of the event, while the parade was accompanied by a Chinese pop song “You’re my flower” by Wubai – recomposed by Zhong-Yao, Kuang for a local orchestra. The audience welcomed the parade to the event using loud and stunning applause that has caught the attention of the whole world. (Jhong-Qing, Zhu; 2009)

Techno, which is a style of fast heavy electronic dance music, plays a dynamic performance and also incorporates music by Taiwan pop singers’ best-selling songs, such as ‘You are my flower’ of Wu Bai and ‘Bo Peep Bo Peep’ of Tsai-Hua Wang. That is also a reason why the Techno Nezha immediately received the peoples’ sympathy and recognition, because their performances ring true to the people’s living environment and conditions.

“We have to create a new way to promote Nezha.” said Wen-Zhen Zeng, the secretary of the Sinying Taizih Temple committee. Obviously, Techno music is a good way to attract and gather people again. How is techno and Marshal Nezha able to integrate as one with such perfection? Nezha is a God, but his appearance is marked by his child-like behaviors: dancing of the seven stars, stepping with his golden bangle. The seven stars step is light and quick, but it comes with a form of dignity as well. The beats and rhythm of techno in combination when the steps of Nezha is an innovative cultural product that is favored by the more modern public. In addition, this form of dance highlights the characteristics of Nezha, while making this cultural dance

something to be able to be passed down from one generation to the next as it is used in various events and occasions as a form of celebration.

Puppet Theater – Taiwan Traditional Culture

Taiwanese puppetry originated from the eastern and southern part of Quanzhou, China. The very original puppetry was classified as the Nanguan theatrical performance and its migration to Taiwan was concentrated to cultural districts such as: Monga, Lukang, and Tainan. Hokkiens gathered in these three places and the Nanguan puppetry was regarded as their “Hometown Show”. Puppetry in those days emphasized on the performance of classic literatures using scripts with elegant expressions and was therefore highly popular among scholars.

In order to accommodate to the likings of the public, Nanguan was replaced by Beiguan and the classic literatures were replaced by action plots as well. Temples also began to employ puppetry and opera performing groups to worship their gods and to attract believers. In order for the performing groups to ensure their future employment, they have improved their media entertainment effects in order to gain more popularity. According to the official report of the Taiwanese government in 1928, amongst the 111 performing groups, 28 belonged to the puppetry genre, which was more than the Luntan (Beiguan music) groups (26 in total) and opera groups (14 in total). Puppet shows during those days abstracted storylines from Chinese history, and they were then expressed into action performances.

During the Japanese occupation, the Japanese government banned the performing of puppet shows in order to promote the imperialisation policy. In the late 1950’s, puppet shows were displayed using dazzling stage effects and have attracted many audience. This was a huge divergence from the traditional elegance of Nanguan puppetry and has brought forth a new appearance to puppet shows.

Puppet show “Yunzhou Swordsman – Shi Yan Wen” was broadcasted on TV during the 1970’s and achieved an outstanding rating of 97%. The Taiwanese government later banned the program as it was deemed as a negative influence to the industrial and commercial market. The Pili(霹靂) puppet show was founded later in the 1980’s and marked the rise of a new hero – Su Huan Zhen. The Pili group later established their own cable TV channel and even filmed movies using puppets. They brought forth a series of innovations to the traditional art and Pili puppetry is now a media brand of great renown.

Old Master Q Puppet Theater

Puppetry master Hai-Tai Huang once said: “the classic cannot be excluded, but we must provide the audience with innovations as well. The best ratio is 30% classic and 70% modern” (Ji, 2007). It is therefore necessary for Taiwanese puppetry to retain the tradition and styles while accommodating to the needs of the modern society. Young puppetry Master Ying-Chun Wang mentioned: “my predecessor once told me that the show can be called a puppet show as long as it is acted by the hands and dubbed by our voice”. This concept has therefore provided traditional puppetry with limitless room for innovation. °

Old Master Q is a puppetry product produced on the basis of such concept. The Taichung Sheng-Wu-Chou Puppet Troupe, led by Ying-Chun Wang, started performing Old Master Q using puppet after obtaining its franchise license. It is not uncommon to see Old Master Q and Marshal Nezha performing on the same stage in Wang’s shows. I once asked Wang about the role of Old Master Q in his show, and he answered without hesitation: “God, of course, because my mentor told me that it is the easiest way to position your character if you have no definite role for him. And hence, Old Master Q is now helping Marshal Netzha as a God”



Ying-Chun Wang has also incorporated the concept of morality and environmental protection in modern puppetry for school performances in order to communicate with the younger generations. This has also brought forth a groundbreaking innovation for Taiwanese puppetry.

Survival means of tradition culture – Hybridity

The migrating of mankind leads to the history of cultural exchange and acculturation is seen throughout the history of man. A hybridized culture is displayed by man externally in our daily lives and it is also a way for mankind to adapt to the ever-changing society. Two such examples are: language and food. In the past, the market and fair is a place of hybridization as exotic merchandizes from different places are gathered in one place. The supermarket and exhibitions today serve as the same purpose today and the development of the internet has also facilitated the process of hybridization.

Techno Nezha and Old Master Q are both products of hybridization in the modern world. Fiske (1989:25) indicated that *popular culture is made by the people at the interface between the products of the culture industries and everyday life. Popular*

culture is made by the people, not imposed upon them; it stems from within, from below, not from above.

The source of creativity of cultural hybridization lies readily in readily accessible resources such as: resources of modern capitalism and international communication. These resources are the symbols we use in daily communication such as: M for McDonald's, Hello Kitty, and abbreviations used on the internet and etc. Therefore, a hybridized culture is a form a public art, and it is also an art created by the use of daily resources.

The analysis in terms of hybrid cultures leads to a re-conceptualization of a number of established views. Rather than being eliminated by development, many "traditional cultures" survive through their transformative engagement with modernity. It becomes more appropriate to speak of popular culture as a present-oriented process of invention through complex hybridizations that cut across class, ethnic, and national boundaries. Moreover, popular sectors rarely attempt to reproduce a normalized tradition; on the contrary, they often exhibit openness toward modernity that is at times critical and at times transgressive and even humorous. (Escobar, 1995:219)

The modern presentation of techno Nezha and incorporation of Old Master Q into traditional puppetry has won the favor of the public and is now regarded as a new form of traditional culture. Schech & Haggis(2000:129) stated that *these invented traditions, while usually drawing on the past, tend to be less specific and less binding than their "old" predecessors. They are important in public life, but occupy a much smaller place in the private lives of people than the old traditions did.*

Traditions, whether "old" or "invented," must be understood as changing practices which can be imbued with different meanings and employed to serve a variety of purposes and interests. (Schech & Haggis, 2000:140)

Traditional culture of different eras will all be challenged by the ever-changing environment and they are forced to adapt in order to survive. Tradition is a relative term, and the key to its survival lies in the ability to retain the essential factors while adding new elements in order to attract major audiences. This form of hybridization is especially common on the tides of globalization and internet communication, but the hidden worrisome is also identical in this context.

The hidden worrisome of global acculturation

Most people's cultural tastes and practices were shaped by commercial forms of culture and by public service broadcasting. (Hesmondhalgh, 2008:555). In addition to global brands and the promotion by 3C products, the acculturation caused by these factors is becoming a norm and shared across the internet. Geographical distance is non-existence in the virtual world and people are able to communicate instantly using email or mobile APPs. The global fluids have therefore facilitated globalization of the society with rapid transmission of information, symbols, money, education, risk, and people.

Things are made close through these networked relations. Such a network of technologies, skills, texts and brands, a global hybrid, ensures that the same 'service' or 'product' is delivered in more or less the same way across the entire network. Such products are predictable, calculable, routinized and standardized. (Urry, 2003:57)

Globalized marketing is a process of deterritorialization. Countries with dominant culture also make use of global fluids to spread their value and ideas. All the nations will be identical eventually and this is an irreversible process. Some traditional cultures are incorporated into our lives, such as festival celebrations, social taboo and etc; while others are incorporated into our education, such as folklore, histories and etc. In comparison, globalization of brands, symbols and even food, can be found in each and every corner of our daily lives and our thoughts and behaviors are all affected by these globalized symbols.

Young people in every part of the world are affected by globalization; nearly all of them are aware, although to varying degrees, of a global culture that exists beyond their local culture. Those who are growing up in traditional cultures know that the future that awaits them is certain to be very different from the life their grandparents knew. (Arnett, 2002)

This is a challenge faced by traditional new culture. Marshal Nezha and puppetry may be different from a cultural aspect, but the expression means is nevertheless identical. This form of irreversible expression for the new culture is a consistent symbol used throughout the world and is manipulating the local very essence of local cultures. Hybridization is formed and cultural diversity now faces the risk of extinction.

Our concern may be pointless as the social trend may be beyond that of our imagination in the next few hundred years and what we regard as acculturation may

be regarded as traditional in the future. Or perhaps, having an identical new form of traditional culture throughout the globe is part of the tradition of mankind in this era?

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