

## **The Dilemma of the Revitalization of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Global Homogenization: The Case of Techno Nezha in Taiwan**

Leo Yuan

Department of Fashion Imaging, MingDao University, Taiwan

Holger Briel

Monarch University, Switzerland and Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University,  
People's Republic of China

### **Abstract**

This article concerns itself with the rise of a specific kind of representation of the Daoist deity Nezha in contemporary Taiwan, namely that of Techno Nezha. In many celebrations, the traditional figure of Dancing Nezha has been revitalised into the popular deity dancing to techno music. The article further analyses a survey undertaken by Yuan (2013) which came to the startling conclusion that rather than distracting from the spiritual message, Techno Nezha was able to inspire as much religious reverence and awe as the traditional character. Building on this, a theoretical discussion then ensues on how far tradition can be pushed before it loses the very content it attempts to transmit. This is especially relevant in times of global cultural symbolism in which local cultural intangible heritage knowledge is severely challenged.

**Keywords:** Nezha, intangible cultural heritage, traditional culture, Taiwan

## Globalization Today

Some larger countries, and so-called ‘mainstream culture’, rely on their advantages in dominating mainstream media to demonstrate their strength to other smaller countries. This includes specific language communications, the presentation of military strength, political influence, and even cultural interpretations. The changes created by this process are perhaps so slow at times that they are difficult to detect by people in other countries or cultures. An example could be the rise of American fast-food chains and coffee shops throughout the world, but especially in Asia. It is only in retrospect that one realizes how many of them exist. And it is usually only at that late moment that local discussions on globalization and localization commence.

This had already been stated by Appadurai (1990, p. 5): “The central problem of today's global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization. ...Most often, the homogenization argument subspecies into either an argument about Americanization, or an argument about commoditization, and very often the two arguments are closely linked.” The mostly Western cultural hegemony penetrates deeply into local cultures. It is good to remember that much of this hegemony had been created on the back of military aggression and through capitalist endeavours. In the wake of this uneven globalization, individuals and cultural institutions all have to ask themselves a similar question: How far have other cultures entered the local cultural mainstream?

In Taiwan, the question is particularly difficult to answer. After its stormy relationship with the Chinese mainland and its occupation by Japanese troops for 50 years, it is legitimate to ask what local culture is (still) alive? Like other countries with a colonially chequered past, Taiwan is able to display a unique cross-cultural diversity. But that might not be enough; even if Taiwan created its own characteristic hybridity, would this be sufficient to stave off globalization's homogeneity? How could this trend be countered?

On many accounts, globalization issues are worrying, not just for individual regions, but, unsurprisingly, on a global level. Shopping landscapes are being synchronised the world over. This typically means that fewer local products are sold. Included in these neglected local products are also the creative, cultural and religious fields. Thus, this field also includes the fact that the autonomy and leadership of cultural sovereignty in local regions are faced with increasing erosion and compression. When it comes to the linguistic component of culture, according to a UNESCO (2010) project report about half of the more than 6,000 languages spoken today are in danger of disappearing. As the poet Alitet Nemtushkin described,

If I forget my native speech,  
And the songs that my people sing  
What use are my eyes and ears?  
What use is my mouth?

If I forget the smell of the earth  
And do not serve it well  
What use are my hands?  
Why am I living in the world?

How can I believe the foolish idea  
That my language is weak and poor

If my mother's last words  
Were in Evenki?

Alitet Nemtushkin, Evenki poet (UNESCO, 2010)

More extreme globalization theorists even propose “The End of Place”. In the book of the same title, Cresswell (2004) indicated that today one can see the same fast food, the same brands in department stores, supermarkets, restaurants, etc. all over the world. And he wonders where the sense of the local has gone. Moreover, the integration between global economic development and media communication speeds up the disappearance of local distinguishing features. In the foreseeable future, it seems, the world will become homogenized and little sense of place will remain. We will become the one “electronic society” envisioned by Meyrowitz (1985). Perhaps this is just an illusion, perhaps even a manipulated illusion, but fears that the global is undermining the local are at least to be taken seriously.

When viewing globalization from the vantage point of cultural ecology and cultural geography, the “local” consists of human memory, production, identity, and the living space of imagination. However, this process is neither inevitable nor irreversible as the rest of this article will set out to prove. It is hoped that those special local memories are not easily eliminated by electronic and global franchise brands. Some theories can help us further in approaching this challenge. Culture and ecological adaptation theory was founded by Julian H. Steward and set out in his text *Theory of Culture Change: The methodology of multilineal evolution* (1955). He believed that cultural change existed in cultural adaptation, and there in an important creative process called Cultural Ecology. His causal theory of environmental, technical and social systems highlighted the origin of different geographical characteristics and types of environmental culture, such as cultural ways in which humans adapt to the natural resources and the environment and how to survive when faced with other communities. It analyses the relationship between technology and the environment and special ways of development in specific regions. It stipulates that there exists an environmental adaptability of the cultural core(s), and that this would allow an analysis of cultural differences and similarities.

The theory's main ecological significance is “adaptation to the environment”, the assumption that landscape, climate and geography have a possible effect on cultural production and form. As a leader in cultural geography, Carl Ortwin Sauer defined culture as still deeply influenced by cultural and ecological thinking, and held that culture is akin to a super-organism, also to be found outside human society in accordance with the laws of nature and its development. In the mid-1920s Sauer (2009) wrote the article “Recent Developments in Cultural Geography” and proposed the “landscape” term to describe the relationship between people and the environment and a cultural group’s use of its products gained from the natural landscape. Culture has always been the driving force shaping the landscape (“built environment”). Therefore, the processes of cultural geography focusing on how people create different meanings in a particular local array usually involves a place to live in diversity, in different cultural landscapes where different people interpret and use cultural material differently. This contemporary sense of culture stretches much further than the high culture of modernism and for some time has included artefacts and practices situated in “ordinary culture”, as Williams (1989) has called it. Furthermore, UNESCO defined culture as “a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (UNESCO 2010). Local geographical and ecological environments are therefore of an entirely different lifelike appearance. This localism can be strong at times. One’s intimate and time-intensive knowledge of a topography does ground in an emotional

attachment to a place and it is only fitting that Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) proposed the term “local love” (topophilia), for this phenomenon. “The term topophilia couples sentiment with place.” In a somewhat conciliatory move in order to negotiate between localism and globalization, Robertson (1992: 173-4) proposed “glocalization” in an attempt to amend the understanding of both globalization and local sentiment. This allows for an understanding of the fact that even though global foods, clothing, vehicles, even Internet messages continuously circulating, a region might more or less still be able to retain cultural practices such as the local festival rituals, religions and dietary habits derived from local plants and animals, spices, minerals, the climate, geographical locations, political, economic and other cultural factors. Each combination produces patterns of different cultures and thus the formation of a global cultural diversity. In the following, this diversity will be discussed in reference to specific festivals in contemporary Taiwan.

### **Marshal Nezha in Taiwanese mythology and his transformation into a Techno god**

Nezha (哪吒) is one of the most important gods in Taiwanese religion. He is also known by other names (Na-zha, Na-ja, Nata and the Third Lotus Prince), but “Marshal Nezha” remains the most used and best known. According to Chinese mythology, Nezha is the reincarnation of a spiritual pearl and is said to have been born in the form of a ball of flesh after his mother had been pregnant for three years. His father dissected the ball and Nezha popped out with red lights glowing from his body and cheeks and golden rays shooting from his eyes. Nezha is said to have been born wearing a golden bangle and a band of scarlet silk around his belly.

One day when Nezha was seven, he was washing his magical scarlet silk band in the Eastern Sea when his actions alarmed the army of the Dragon Palace. The Dragon Lord commanded Yaksha (nature spirits) and the Third Prince to confront Nezha, but they were defeated by Nezha’s golden bangle in the blink of an eye. The death of the Prince angered the Dragon Lord and the news was delivered to the Jade Emperor. The Jade Emperor ordered the capture of Nezha’s family, but rebellious Nezha refused to comply and instead committed suicide on the spot. Taiyi Zhenren, his teacher and according to some sources the reincarnation of the first emperor of the Shang dynasty, Shang Tang, then used a lotus flower to revive him and at that point Nezha is said to have become a god.

The story of Nezha’s battle with the Dragon Lord of the Eastern Sea is very popular among the Chinese, perhaps because Nezha is also known as the Marshal of the Taoist gods and because of his courage and unparalleled skills. Nezha is therefore worshipped by the people as Marshal Nezha to commemorate his heroic acts. In olden times, Marshal Nezha’s worshippers were mainly warriors, but today Nezha is regarded as the guardian of infants (Nezha’s child image) and also worshipped by the transportation industry (in the image of Nezha riding a hot wheel) for protection in modern Chinese culture. Transportation companies have erected shrines to Nezha in their offices and officials have them in their homes to pray for success and good fortune. There are also mystics in the temples who are said to be possessed by Nezha, and in these cases the mystic (乩童) speaks like a child. Jhang-Yu Wu (2003) wrote that after the 1980s folk belief in Taiwan centered on Ji-Gong Buddha and Nezha, with Nezha being the most popular among mystics. Their role, in the days when Taiwan was an agrarian society, was to provide social services, such as arbitrating in disputes and invoking the gods to solve the villagers’ problems. Even today, Nezha is still revered as a major deity. Traditionally, Nezha worship has taken place within a certain, traditional aural framework which was based on traditional Chinese religious music. But this has changed dramatically over the last ten to fifteen years or so.

“Techno” is an electronic music and dance form originating in the late 1980s in Detroit and has continued its victorious sweep through youth cultures ever since. It is also popular in Taiwan and was introduced into the Taiwanese Yanshui district fireworks parade in 2005. Since then it has gained great popularity in the country and been used at many large events in modern Taiwan. The Din Tao performance was made known to the world in 2009 at the World Games organised in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Forty different Nezha costumes appeared during the opening ceremony of the World Games, with the “gods” wearing sunglasses and white gloves and riding motorcycles. The parade was accompanied by the Chinese pop song “You are my flower” by Wu Bai, rewritten by Zhong-Yao Kuang for a local orchestra. The local audience welcomed the parade with loud and stunning applause and it went on to capture the attention of audiences everywhere (Jhong-Qing, Zhu; 2009).

Techno music is dynamic and is also incorporated in the music of some Taiwanese pop singers’ best-selling songs, such as the above-mentioned song “You are my flower” and the popular song “Bo Peep Bo Peep” by Tsai-Hua Wang. Given the popularity of this music style, it is no wonder that Techno Nezha immediately appealed to many especially younger people as these performances can be seen to have relevance for many people’s modern lifestyles (Yuan, 2014).

This is not the first time that techno music has been twinned with traditional cultural practices. A recent example can also be found in Suzhou, People’s Republic of China. Thus, for the last five years or so, when walking down Guan Qian Shopping Street, the sound of techno music can be overwhelming at times. It originates from the silversmiths’ workshops in which silver is hammered down to the speedy rhythm of this music. While it might be argued that it is the rhythm that lends itself to creating work more speedily, it can also be argued that it is used especially to attract the younger generation. And the trichotomy of contemporary culture–traditional culture–commerce can be seen interacting here. However, the monetary moment might be stronger in this example than is the case in the Nezha complex.

### **Research aim and issues raised**

The remainder of this article will examine the way in which Nezha's reverence and usage in Taiwanese culture has found a unique way of appealing to his heritage while opening up itself to contemporary practices especially designed to attract the younger generation. As such, this practice could be viewed as one possible way of opening up intangible heritage to new and younger audiences and participants. And indeed, this is what will be suggested in the following. In order to do so, a number of questions need to be raised.

What does tradition mean? When Nezha is transformed into a techno god via modern performances, is this still an attribution to tradition? And if the answer is NO, how does one mark the border between tradition and innovation, especially when, by now, the younger generation views Techno Nezha the same way as the traditional Nezha, and also sees him as the seat of spiritual power?

Furthermore, if one wants to revitalize a certain traditional aspect of culture, the typical situation one faces is that this aspect has remained in a fixed state for a long time. Often however, this state is, if not outright rejected, at least benignly neglected by younger generations and thus in the long run condemned to die a slow death. So, shouldn't this traditional form be changed in order to keep it alive, and if YES, how so? Where is the border between tradition and (necessary) transformation?

Lastly, these questions arise against the backdrop of an intensifying globalisation of culture, with cultural practices all over the world showing signs of unifying processes. How can individual cultural practices fit into this picture without losing their specificities? It will be suggested that traditions indeed need to “update” in order to survive in a changing environment, and that this “upgrade” is an advantage in keeping them alive.

### **Tradition and cultural review**

Typically, a revitalization process is undertaken in order to revitalize a tradition and to assure its survival. In order to approach this issue, it is therefore important to understand the terms applied. According to Shils (1981):

“Traditio” was a mode of transferring the ownership of private property in Roman law. Tradition is whatever is persistent or recurrent through transmission, regardless of the substance and institutional setting. It includes orally transmitted beliefs as well as those transmitted in writing. It includes secular as well as sacred beliefs; it includes beliefs which were arrived at by ratiocination and by methodical, theoretically controlled intellectual procedures as well as beliefs which were accepted without intense reflection. It includes beliefs thought to have been divinely revealed as well as interpretations of those beliefs. It includes beliefs formed through experience and beliefs formed by logical deduction.

UNESCO (2002) further defined “traditional culture” as “social practices and representations which a social group considers to have been derived from the past through intergenerational transmission (even if these are recent inventions) and to which the group designates a differentiated status.”

To paraphrase, it seems that there exist at least some beliefs and practices worthy of transmission to future generations, even if they are more recent inventions, and we can call all of these practices traditions. Individuals of a certain (usually older) generation hold that these beliefs ring true and should be kept (alive). Thus, Stuart Hall offers a broad view of culture as the “lived practices” or “practical ideologies which enable a society, group or class to experience, define, interpret and make sense of its conditions of existence” (as cited in Eagleton, 2000).

Similarly, Schafer (1998) discusses the process of tradition and culture in the following:

Clearly, what we must work towards is an understanding that development – like culture – is a dynamic, evolutionary process which is constantly changing, mutating and adapting over time in response to new conditions and altered circumstances. For what is the point of development in the first place if it is not to make improvements in all the various components and dimensions of the cosmic condition?

Thus, there is little doubt that culture consists of dynamic processes based upon the living environment of a given period. Communities and power structures are always in flux and some older traditions can be left by the wayside. If a community decides that certain inherited cultural practices are worth keeping, new ways of doing so might have to be invented. This of course presents its defenders with a philosophical paradox: How to create new ways of celebrating a traditionally fixed cultural practice? Doesn't the idea of tradition actually exclude such a

possibility? In practice though, this kind of adapting traditions happens all the time, and it provides room for necessary and sustained discussions, which take on traditional characteristics themselves, for instance in cultural archives and organisations and through discussions in the media. These discussions themselves are based on actual cultural events taking place. No opera performance without comparison to earlier stagings thereof, no remake film screening without comparison to an 'original' treatment of the subject. Here it is good to remember that the creation of a new “tradition” is just a reaction and adaption to the needs of a new situation in society, which as social adaptation is an inevitable part of change.

No tradition is (for)ever fixed. Shils (1981) indicated that:

[T]he constellation of symbols, clusters of images, are received and modified. They change in the process of transmission as interpretations are made of the tradition presented; they change also while they are in the possession of their recipients. This chain of transmitted variants of a tradition is also called a tradition, as in the “Platonic tradition” or the “Kantian tradition.” As a temporal chain, a tradition is a sequence of variations on received and transmitted themes. The connectedness of the variations may consist in common themes, in the contiguity of presentation and departure, and in descent from a common origin.

In a similar vein, advertising guru Peter Drucker's famous dictum “innovate or die” refers not only to the advertising industry but to most walks of life. When applied to intangible cultural heritage, perhaps we can rephrase it to “revitalize or die”. Indeed, if one insists on maintaining the status quo of traditional culture, without innovation, such cultural traditional practices will be in danger of gradually dying out.

One problem tangible cultural heritage does not have is that of authenticity. In intangible heritage practices, though, it is the recreational process that can only be the guarantor of this authenticity. The “Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approaches for Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage” pointed out that “intangible heritage is constantly recreated, the term ‘authenticity’ as applied to tangible cultural heritage is not relevant when identifying and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.” Along the same lines, Smeets (2004) indicated that:

[...] authenticity in relation to intangible cultural heritage is a moot point; the future will tell whether it is a useful notion in the context of the safeguarding of that part of our heritage. We know by now that it cannot mean “historically correct” as intangible cultural heritage by definition is evolving.

The so-called “traditional” is therefore unable to survive as a pure idea by itself and requires human “users” to enact, amend and/or develop it. People of any period used or created the most convenient or effective means for better/different performances, and therefore were always already involved in creating new artistic forms or content. Typically, a new generation would always change some of the old ways, either out of necessity or out of a different understanding of practicing history. In order for traditions to survive, they need to be reconsidered as rebirth and new opportunity, as individuals typically perform their traditions because they either consider them cognitively relevant to the time they live in or because they have a certain nostalgic longing for practices they remember from their childhood. Especially the latter would not be sufficient to ensure the viability of a certain tradition, as it is specific generation bound and contingent.

One way forward and out of the predicament of tradition vs. innovation might be to view heritage not just as a way to conserve something, but rather to participate in it, to engage it. An interesting application of such an approach can be found in the work undertaken by Thomas Fischer. He conducted research into the heritage of early Jacquard weaving looms in Suzhou. But rather than just being content with a descriptive view of heritage, he attempted to engage this cultural heritage and make it take part of a discursive practice. Fischer (2015, p. 4) explains:

We are investigating the following research questions: Can the operation of the Jacquard loom and its significance in the development of the digital computer be illustrated and modelled digitally so as to generate a set of punch cards, which, if run on a Jacquard loom, produce a textile pattern that explains the functioning of the loom? Could such a textile pattern be produced so as to engage museum visitors with the historical significance of Suzhou's silk weaving, and could the sale of products of this nature be set up to benefit the maintenance of the looms? In other words: Can the Jacquard loom be programmed to tell the story of its past in order to secure its future?

The answers to these questions were all positive and textiles telling their own stories were created: "This visual story was translated into 1278 punch cards, woven on a loom, and integrated into a series of notebook computer sleeves, which we intend to propose as inspiration for products to be offered in the museum shop of No. 1 Silk Factory and in other places in Suzhou" (Fischer 2015, p. 7). This approach had a number of significant advantages over more traditional handling of cultural heritage. Arguably most important was the fact that the next generation was actively involved in physically making use of the material at hand; interactions included a number of diverse practices and tool usage. The outcome was tangible and yet interacted as a cultural catalyst for silicon (computers) and silk. Lastly, the possibility of monetisation was created.

But it was not only practice that was highlighted in the project; due to its successful outcome, its theoretical underpinnings could also be validated, and were summed up as follows:

This [approach] argues for a participatory, re-constructivist rather than conservation-oriented approach to heritage preservation. This approach engages the pattern making and storytelling opportunities offered by traditional arts and crafts to tell stories of these arts' and crafts' long histories with a view to stimulate engagement with, and appreciation of the intangible treasures of arts and craft. It does not conserve arts and crafts in the state they are found in, but engages in their practices in ways that are sometimes time-tested and sometimes new, offering entry points for the appreciation of intangible traditional values, stimulating new interest, introducing young people to traditional practices, and leading to the development of new forms of expression and new ways of making. (Fischer 2015, p. 10)

It is this kind of discursive approach that is also at play when confronting Techno Nezha.

### **The young generation accepts the new image of Marshal Nezha**

As stated above, Techno music is a style of fast and heavy electronic dance music popular in the US and Europe beginning in the late 1980s. At least in the beginning, it was associated with rave party and heavy drug use, especially Ecstasy, and as such was even conceived as an

antipode to traditional musical and recreational culture. Perhaps it speaks for its own historicization process that today it is used as a way to shore up another tradition in another part of the world. However, there is at least one underlying commonality: If Nezha was connected with (mild) rebellion in a social context, the same could be said for techno on an aural level.

Techno music is representative of a certain kind of modernization process and combined with traditional religious Daoist practices, Techno Nezha actually becomes a medium for traditional religion to be transmitted to modern society, an, if one will, invented tradition played out in a living environment. “We have to create a new way to promote Nezha.” said Wen-Zhen Zeng, the secretary of Sinying Taizih Temple Committee when interviewed by the authors in 2013. Obviously, techno is a good way to attract many people but how are techno and Marshal Nezha able to allow themselves to be integrated with such apparent ease? Nezha is a god, but his appearance is marked by his child-like behavior: his dancing of the seven stars step with his golden bangle. The seven stars step is light and quick, but it comes imbued with a kind of choric dignity. The beats and rhythms of techno in combination with Nezha's steps are an innovative cultural product that is popular with the Taiwanese public of today. In addition, this form of dance highlights the characteristics of Nezha and the cultural dance therefore has the capability to be passed on from generation to the next. Irrespective of whether this will be the case, it will become part of the changing tradition of Nezha celebrations throughout the ages.

### **Survey: Techno Nezha and the young**

In order to ascertain the younger generation's affinity for Techno Nezha, in 2014 a survey of university students from various colleges was undertaken at MingDao University, a well established university in Taiwan with an international student body. Table 1 lists the characteristics of the study participants. The study included 171 female students (59.2%) and 118 male ones (40.8%), with a mean age of 20.55 years ( $SD = 1.99$  years). Of these, sixteen (5.5%) participants always attend temple fairs, 213 (73.7%) attend once in a while, and 60 (20.8%) never attend. A majority of the participants (84.4%) attend temple fairs as audience, 34 (12.6%) serve as staff sometimes, and 8 (3.0%) serve as staff all the time. The most common way for the respondents to have been introduced to Marshal Nezha's myth was television (78.9%), followed by temple fairs (59.2%), the telling of the story of the myth (58.8%), by their elders (38.8%), in school (32.9%), and through performance events (32.5%). Almost 40% (38.8%) of the participants thought that Techno Nezha is a kind of deity, whereas 58.8% think Techno Nezha is a kind of creative performance art piece but not a deity. More than half of the participants 176 (60.9%) believe Techno Nezha would literally bless people, while 36.7% did not think so. In detail, the results are the following:

Variable	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	118	40.8
Female	171	59.2
Age (Mean: 20.55 years, <i>SD</i> = 1.99 years)		
Frequency of attending temple fairs		
Always	16	5.5
Once in a while	213	73.7
Never	60	20.8
Role when attending temple fair ( <i>n</i> = 270)		
Staff all the time	8	3.0
Staff sometimes	34	12.6
Audience	228	84.4
How they had received information about Marshal Nezha's myth		
School	95	32.9
Television	228	78.9
The elders	112	38.8
Video game	43	14.9
Comic book	43	14.9
Story myth	170	58.8
Radio	14	4.8
Temple fair	171	59.2
Performance event	94	32.5
Other	9	3.1
Do you think of Techno Nezha as god?		
Yes	112	38.8
No	170	58.8
Other	7	2.4
Do you believe Techno Nezha would bless people?		
Yes	176	60.9
No	106	36.7
Other	7	2.4

Table 1: Characteristics of the study participants (*N* = 289)

Table 2 lists the descriptive statistics for the cognitive understanding of Nezha's image as opposed to non-Nezha images (see Figure 1). The results show that the scores for the traditional understanding of the image are greater than 4, indicating that the participants strongly agree that the traditional images were like the 'old' Nezha. In contrast, the scores for each techno image ranged from 2.90 to 3.59, suggesting that the participants moderately agree that the techno images were also like Nezha. However, the scores of each non-Nezha image are less than 2, indicating that the participants strongly agree that non-Nezha images were unlike Nezha.

Image	Descriptive		Frequency (%)		
	Mean	SD	Tend to be unlike	Neutral	Tend to be like
1. Tradition (cartoon)	4.18	0.96	6.2	16.6	77.2
2. Tradition (statue)	4.33	0.77	2.1	12.5	85.4
3. Tradition (statue)	4.23	0.83	3.1	14.9	82.0
4. Techno (wearing glasses)	2.90	1.22	38.4	29.1	32.6
5. Techno (riding motorcycle)	3.50	1.05	16.3	31.8	51.9
6. Techno (dancing)	3.59	1.04	12.9	31.8	55.3
7. Non-Nezha (Ji-Gong Buddha)	1.41	0.70	89.6	9.3	1.0
8. Non-Nezha (rabbit)	1.17	0.45	96.9	3.1	0.0
9. Non-Nezha (cartoon)	1.55	0.96	86.9	6.9	6.3

Score of 1 to 2 is classified as “tend to be unlike”, 3 as “neutral”, and 4 to 5 as “tend to be like”.

Table 2: Recognition of each image of Nezha

				
Tradition (cartoon)	Tradition (statue)	Tradition (statue)	Techno (wearing glasses)	Techno (riding motorcycle)
				
Techno (dancing)	Non-Nezha (Ji-Gong Buddha)	Non-Nezha (rabbit)	Non-Nezha (cartoon)	

Figure 1

Table 3 lists the comparison of the recognition of Nezha via attending temple fairs. The results indicate that no difference was found in the cognition of the traditional image, the techno image, and non-Nezha images between the participants who attend temple fairs and those who don't ( $p > .05$ ).

Image	Category	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Traditional	(1) Once	229	4.28	0.64	1.51	.131
	(2) Never	60	4.13	0.72		
Techno	(1) Once	229	3.37	1.02	1.32	.189
	(2) Never	60	3.18	0.96		
Non-Nezha	(1) Once	229	1.38	0.50	0.14	.885
	(2) Never	60	1.37	0.47		

\**p* < .05

Table 3: Recognition of Nezha by the experience of attending temple fairs

Table 4 lists the comparison of recognition of Nezha via attending temple fairs. The results indicate that no difference was found in the recognition of the traditional image, the techno image and non-Nezha images between the participants who serve as staff when attending temple fair and the audience (*p* > .05).

Image	Category	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Traditional	(1) Staff	42	4.33	0.76	0.71	.480
	(2) Audience	228	4.26	0.61		
Techno	(1) Staff	42	3.52	0.94	1.45	.147
	(2) Audience	228	3.28	1.02		
Non-Nezha	(1) Staff	42	1.38	0.55	-0.01	.994
	(2) Audience	228	1.38	0.49		

\**p* < .05

Table 4: Recognition of Nezha when attending temple fairs

Table 5 lists the comparison of cognition of Nezha between participants who think of Techno Nezha as a deity and those who do not. The result indicates that no difference was found in the cognition of the traditional image between the two groups (*p* > .05). The score of participants who think of Techno Nezha as a god was significantly higher than that of those who did not in both cognition of the techno image (*M* = 3.66 vs. 3.13, *p* < .05) and in cognition of the Non-Nezha images (*M* = 1.48 vs. 1.31, *p* < .05).

Image	Category	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Traditional	(1) Gods	112	4.21	0.68	-0.75	.455
	(2) Not Gods	170	4.27	0.65		
Techno	(1) Gods	112	3.66	0.89	4.46*	<.001
	(2) Not Gods	170	3.13	1.02		
Non-Nezha	(1) Gods	112	1.48	0.53	2.82*	<.005
	(2) Not Gods	170	1.31	0.46		

\**p* < .05

Table 5: Cognition of Nezha in the participants who think of Techno Nezha as a god and those who do not

Table 6 lists the comparison of recognition of Nezha between the participants who believe Techno Nezha would bless people and those who do not. The results indicate that no difference was found in the recognition of the traditional image between the two groups ( $p > .05$ ). The score of participants who believe Techno Nezha would bless people was significantly higher than that of those who do not think so in both recognition of the techno image ( $M = 3.61$  vs.  $2.94$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and cognition of Non-Nezha images ( $M = 1.43$  vs.  $1.30$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Image	Category	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Traditional	(1) Would bless	176	4.28	0.67	1.03	.305
	(2) Would not bless	106	4.20	0.66		
Techno	(1) Would bless	176	3.61	0.91	5.86*	<.001
	(2) Would not bless	106	2.94	0.99		
Non-Nezha	(1) Would bless	176	1.43	0.53	2.10*	.037
	(2) Would not bless	106	1.30	0.43		

\* $p < .05$

Table 6: Recognition of Nezha in the participants who believe Techno Nezha would bless people and those who do not

This survey shows that 73.7% students attend temple fairs just once in a while, a number which is largely in line with general temple visits in Taiwan. They are therefore far from being branded religious fanatics. Even so, most students did not think of Techno Nezha as god, but still a similar percentage of most students believe Techno Nezha would bless people. This belief may have been affected by Techno Nezha's troupes from and in the temples, but it also shows that Techno Nezha is still undergoing an image transformation. According to the photo-choice exercise on the questionnaire, the traditional and modern image of Nezha were both well recognised by the young. Among them there exist both the "weak belief" that the god would bless them and that the god would not bless them. The fact that both groups adhere to Techno Nezha shows the uniting power his image has acquired and also rekindles believers' participation. The question of whether this exemplifies the demise of a certain practice of culture or its rebirth, or simply reflects inevitable transformation, is one that can only be answered in the future.

### Survival means of traditional culture and modern-day hybridity

As can be seen in the survey, Techno Nezha was largely accepted in his new guise, by some even as a god. The acceptance of hybridity in culture(s), as displayed above, is of course nothing new. Throughout the history of mankind, omnipresent migrations of people and ideas have led to cultural exchanges and acculturations. Hybridized cultures are displayed by humans externally in their daily lives and they are also a way for mankind to adapt to ever-changing circumstances. Two such examples are language and food. In the past, the market and the fair are places of hybridization as 'exotic' merchandize from different places are gathered together in one place and consumed. The supermarket and exhibitions today serve the same purpose today and the development of the internet as a global marketplace has further facilitated this process of hybridization.

Techno Nezha is a performance of cultural hybridization in a specific society. Fiske (1989, p. 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 sources for the creativity in such cultural hybridizations lie in the symbols we use in daily communication, such as the golden arches of McDonald's fame, Hello Kitty's traversing the globe and the abbreviations and emojis used on the internet (LOL, etc.) It becomes clear then that such hybridized cultures have become the bedrock of cultural performativity and are a form of public art, an art created by the application and usage of such daily resources. As much is claimed by Escobar (1995, p. 219):

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.

The modern presentation of Techno Nezha has won the favor of the public and is now regarded as a new form of traditional culture. Especially the younger generation think that Techno Nezha is the same as the traditional Nezha who held divine powers. But there is a difference in intensity. Schech & Haggis 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, p. 129 & 140)

Traditional displays of culture of different eras has always been challenged by ever-changing environments and they are forced to adapt in order to survive. Tradition is a relative term, and the key to its survival lies in its ability to retain essential factors while adding new elements in order to attract major new audiences. While this kind of movement has always run the danger of losing itself to powerful “extraneous” influences, it would not have survived without them. This is still true in the age of globalization and internet communication.

### **Conclusion: The hidden worries of global acculturation**

In order to allow for differentiated cultural productions and values, these need to be seen in relation to universal values, which themselves exist in various forms and need to be open to dialogue and mutual respect. UNESCO emphasizes cultural diversity, and hopes to establish a global cultural environment on balance, equality of cultural dialogue and exchange. This includes making available materials to sensitive people to the need to not only to protect but to develop of local traditional cultural resources. Globalization and localization in today's societies are equally present, with fast-food joints and national or local festivals staged by individual ethnic groups.

Globalization is not simply the standardization of the world due to the diffusion of the few productions, values and images exported by the West. It constantly creates new diversity. Cultural products and images are distributed and consumed worldwide are received differently depending on the local conditions (political, economic, and social) and by the public, according to sex, age, race, and status social and other factors. They are also reconfigured and hybridized, and those best selling in the local market of the new middle class and riches-nouveaux are often those which have assimilated American cultural influence and maintained its “perfume” by grafting all local elements. This negotiation of meaning at the local level creates products that are not mere copies, as shown by the example of the famous Italian “Spaghetti Western”, which then in turn influenced American cinema.

Mainstream cultural power is no longer only concentrated in the place where a culture is born; it derives from a dynamic trade across markets and cultures to the point that it is almost impossible to imagine local cultural creativity to survive even as marginalized other of globalization. As its underlying economy philosophy is profit maximisation, it only provides respect to the specific cultures of a local market as long as this does not harm its principles. (Johnston, 2000).

So far the theory. The results of the above survey make it clear, though, that there is a continued acceptance of old local traditions when combined with modern cultural phenomena. The new image of Nezha is very popular especially among younger people. It might be speculated that if the same survey had been carried out among older participants, the acceptance level of the new Nezha might be lower than in the present sample. This, however, does not take away from the power of this new image and its contribution to the revitalisation of the Nezha cult.

The results also make clear that we should pay attention to the conservation of central philosophical ideas in intangible heritage rather than judge a cultural practice such as the devotion to a deity by its appearance or indeed his/her soundtrack. Who determines what these central ideas are and how this is done is another issue in need of discussion, but some kind of collective judgment would arguably need to be effected, if the process is to have communal validity.

Even though communication and its tools change with the passing of every dynasty, government and generation and even though the surface of performances of intangible heritage are always slightly different from those of a generation before, the cultural and religious beliefs informing such practices might not, at least in a Taiwanese context. As the survey demonstrated, people still worship Nezha and believe that Nezha can protect their children, no matter what performances are put on.

An additional lesson to be learned from this survey is that if we want to revitalize traditional cultural performances, it is important not to set out to “fix” a tradition stretching back 300 years or so, as is the case for our research object. Tradition is never completely static, never “historically correct” and there is no right or wrong way of engaging it. If a present generation sees it as its mission to transmit these traditional cultures to the next generation smoothly, we may just have to pay attention to the ways in which the young generation likes to engage with and accepts and willingly participates in such revitalizations.

While having marked hybridizations as a positive and necessary development in the revitalization of cultural practices, some dangers do lurk in this process as well. These dangers particularly involve the weakening of the local. As stated above, the power of global

commercial homogenization ought not to be underestimated: “Most people’s cultural tastes and practices were shaped by commercial forms of culture and by public service broadcasting” (Hesmondhalgh, 2008, p. 555). In addition to global brands and the promotion of global products, the acculturation caused by these factors is becoming a norm and shared across the virtual and non-virtual world. Geographical distance is non-existent in the virtual world and people are able to communicate instantly using email, social media or mobile applications. The global flows have therefore facilitated the globalization of society through rapid transmission of information, symbols, money, education, risk and people.

In this globally networked world, cultural practices easily influence each other and “major” cultures have more weight than minor ones. 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, p. 57).

Globalized marketing can be viewed a process of deterritorialization. Countries with a more dominant culture globally also make use of these global flows to spread their values and ideas. Some traditional cultures are incorporated into our lives, such as festival celebrations, social taboos etc., while others are incorporated into our education, such as folklore, histories etc. In comparison, the 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).

And herein lies the challenge traditions face today: The power of the local needs to be strengthened in order to fruitfully cooperate with the global in creating such appealing hybridizations as Techno Nezha. Local cultural practices will and do stay alive, but only through skilled patronage. Techno Nezha may be different from his traditional rendition, but he nevertheless still manages to convey traditional ideas. Nezha has not become another, he has merely learned to dance to a different tune. Interventions such as the one discussed above might just be able to avert the risk of cultural extinction through the application of cultural diversity, beating cultural globalization at its own game.

Our concern may be pointless in the long run as our social imagination only stretches so far into the future; perhaps, having an identical new form of traditional culture throughout the globe will be part of the tradition of humankind then. But for now, cultural distinction is still a powerful tool to pay respect to cultural differences, even if these traditions are dynamic themselves and distinct from some of their own histories.

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**Corresponding author:** Leo Yuan

**Email:** leoyuan@ms4.hinet.net