The Cultural Politics of Techno in Taiwan: The Case of Shining 3 Girls

ABSTRACT

This article attempts to elucidate cultural politics of Techno as the global popular in the local context of Taiwan. My discussion centers on the transformations of “Taiker Techno Music” along with the example of Shining 3 Girls in terms of their music and performance to explicate the cultural dynamics of localities in Taiwan. In this paper, I will examine the music and performance of Shining 3 Girls to demonstrate the local specificities manifested in “Taiker Techno Music.” I would also deal with the body performance of Shining 3 Girls such as their dancing and dressing style to argue for the locomotions by females and thus to challenge the gender divisions of the global as masculine and the local as feminine.

Key Words: Cultural Politics, Global Popular, Taiker Techno Music, Shining 3 Girls, Gender Politics
Techno music, which emerged in the 1980s in the West and includes house, trance, Brit-hip, garage and hip-hop, has now successfully broadened out to become one of the most popular musical genres in the world. Simon Frith, the well-known cultural critic, observes that popular music has gone global, with dance music leading the way. Daniel Chamberlin also acknowledges the global popularity of techno music. Since it established connections with rave parties and the culture of the pub starting in the 1990s, techno has deeply engaged pop music’s international formations. The global spread of techno does not entail a homogenization of popular music, however: local inflections and variations continue to mark its widening dissemination. In Taiwan, for example, the infusion of Taiwanese folk elements has produced a local variant, “Taiker Techno Music.” In Taiker Techno Music, different strains of gender, class and national identity can be discovered -- such as the cultural representations and styles of “Taiker” (台客) or “Taimei” (台妹) -- that make Taiker Techno Music a unique offshoot of global techno.

The cover picture for the first Shining 3 Girls album.

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1 Please check the website of the Washington Observer for more information: http://www.washingtonobserver.org/SocCul-Techno-030503CN25.cfm
This article attempts to elucidate the global cultural politics of techno within the local context of Taiwan. The discussion centers on the transformations of Taiker Techno Music (台客電子舞曲) in the music and performances of Shining 3 Girls (閃亮三姊妹) in order to explicate the cultural dynamics of locality. The music and the performances of the body will be examined to demonstrate the local specificities manifested. It will be argued that the dance and dress style of Shining 3 Girls challenges the gender divisions of “the global as masculine and the local as feminine”.

Shining 3 Girls is a female group made up of three sisters, who are young, energetic and sexy, particularly distinguished by their Taiker or Taimei (台妹) style and taste. They combine techno music with local Chinese and Taiwanese lyrics and the particular performing style known as “Electronic Float”. The concept of “Tai” or “Taiker,” which in Taiwan is widely entangled with history, economics, politics and culture, has become more complicated due to the process of cultural globalization. This paper, therefore, addresses the intersection of global techno dance music and the local culture of Taiker in order to rethink the dialectics of the global and the local and to revisit the gendered qualities of globalization.

While the global popularity of techno and rave culture has drawn attention recently in Taiwan, few critics have paid attention to the emergence of local variations of Taiker techno. Most academic discussion still focuses on the relations among techno, rave parties and drugs. In this paper, I will investigate the local transformations discovered in the music and performance of Shining 3 Girls. Important questions include: what are the global flows that are embodied in the aesthetic representations and imaginations of culture represented in Taiker techno? How do local subjects serve as the material space to contain the flows capital, technology and ideology? These questions will be addressed with reference to the aesthetic implications and cultural politics of Taiker techno.

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2 Taiker Techno Music is one kind of Techno, designed especially with Taiker as the target audience.

3 “Shining 3 Girls” are described as “the legend of Taimei, the only teen-aged girls group of Techno that aims to make the global audience’s eyes wide open.” Please see: http://www1.iwant-song.com/d-a0001/?sn=d-a0001_20030524_01.
Neither Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s Marxist notion of the “cultural industry” nor Homi K. Bhabha’s postcolonial vocabulary of “hybridity” can fully explain the cultural complexity of Techno as the global popular in the context of Taiwan’s musical geographies. The former concept overlooks local mobility, while the latter overvalorizes local agency, thus underestimating global capital control. In his essay, “On Popular Music,” Adorno notes critically that popular music is always already planned by “structural standardization” and “pseudo-individualization” (305-07). He argues that large-scale economic concentration has institutionalized the standardization of popular music, with market competition making imitation necessary. As Ardono remarks, “the most successful hits, types, and ‘ratios’ between elements were imitated, and the process culminated in the crystallization of standards” (306). According to Ardono, popular music is a completely dominated cultural industry, determined by market and capital. In this sense, all local music has always already been pre-structured by global capital. Likewise, Bhabha’s concept of cultural hybridity excessively stresses cultural ambiguity and ambivalence in the use of such terms as “beyond,” “in-between,” or “transnational/translational” (Bhabha 4-5). Such postcolonial discourse cannot analytically specify locality but instead replicates global hierarchy, becoming the accomplice of global power. If the ambiguity of transnational cultural flows is overemphasized, it becomes impossible to grasp the material conditions that ensure their circulation, making it difficult to clarify the power relations at work.

Though the power of the market and capital will certainly have structuring effects on popular music, I want to explore the relationship between locality and creativity in music, illustrated by the example of Shining 3 Girls. Cultural globalization, or the cultural encounter of the global and the local, should not be grasped in terms of the discourse of the cultural hegemony of colonialism. As Arjun Appadurai notes, the flows of cultural globalization are in “disjuncture.” In other words, we should not regard the process of cultural globalization in terms of the simplified oppositions of colonizers and colonized or of centered cultures and marginal ones. In addition, we should not romanticize national

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4 See Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” (27-47).
narrations that exaggerate the mobility and agency of local and national culture without considering the impacts of global capital.

1. TECHNO AS THE GLOBAL POPULAR

Broadly speaking, Techno refers to any music created through digital technologies such as the tape recorder, turntable, synthesizer, computer, drum machine, electronic bass and computer software. The advent of digital technology in the early 1980s resulted in the invention of a number of different forms of music, but it was particularly significant for the new formation of Techno. Arguably, Techno music or dance music was initially an alternative music popularized mainly among the youth in the U.K. Techno, in connection with acid house parties or rave parties and DIY culture (musical self-creation as a trope for youth autonomy), formed the so-called rave or club culture as an expression of protest against mainstream (musical) culture. In successive historical periods, experimental music, including rock, hip-hop and techno, have expressed dissatisfaction with society and often called for political agenda. In 1988, rave spread across Europe and the U.S. as an expressive youth subculture, with the youth involved thinking of themselves as sharing a sense of community this music ritual. Through music, they could seek physical and spiritual liberation. However, the perceived widespread use of drugs such as LSD (Lysergic Acid Diethylamide) and Ecstasy (MDMA) in this club scene aroused a sense of moral panic leading to state intervention. In 1991, the Entertainments (Increased Penalties) Act outlawed the staging of unlicensed raves, and the legislation of Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 authorized the police to “remove persons attending or preparing for a rave” in the U.K. (Bennett 124). In these political circumstances, rave parties were forced to become indoor activities in the pub or club.

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5 The precise origins of this form of music are debatable, but it is generally agreed that U.K. dance music played a pioneering role in the global formation and popularity of Techno music.

6 DIY culture stresses the independence of the individual and encourages the creation of individual forms of expression. Moreover, the philosophy of DIY culture emphasizes rational communication. See The Electronic Bible of Dance Music (電子聖經舞曲) (20-21).
rather than being held outdoors as before. This process is referred to as the “clubization of dance scenes.”

Over the last two decades, by means of the combination of technological progress and accessibility, a “global techno tribe”\(^7\) has gradually been formed with the revival of pub culture and the rave community. The development of technology allows more people to participate in techno culture, listening to digital music or actually creating their own music through various electronic devices. The use of computers, the Internet and MP3 files have also made it possible for people to combine music and technology in new ways. However, it is the commercialization of the rave scene that has done most to accelerate the worldwide popularity of techno. Initially, techno was only an alternative music that was distanced from the pop mainstream because its musical uniqueness was connected to dancing and club culture and because its stress on self-creativity appealed to a large number of young people. Moreover, Techno’s PLUR\(^8\) spirit allowed the audience to imagine their desires for a Utopia of Peace, Love, Unity and Respect in a musical form. Global investors soon recognized that techno represented a lucrative enterprise, and this gave rise to the phenomenon of international corporations trying to position techno as part of a globally profitable cultural economy.

II. TAIKER TECHNO IN TAIWAN

The global popularity of techno music highlights the importance of the flow of images and capital through the global media. According to Simon During, the global popular includes at least four levels: “financing; governmental regulations; technology and market appeal of particular stars” (810). During’s analysis helps explain how techno becomes popular in the socio-economic context of Taiwan. For example, the popularity of Shining 3 Girls depends on the flow of capital, governmental regulation (the revival of the electronic float), technology (musical techniques) and star charisma (the unique

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\(^7\) The concept of the “global techno tribe” refers to a worldwide shared culture and community for youth through the consumption of techno and the help of technology like the Internet to transgress the limitations of time and space.

\(^8\) P.L.U.R. stands for peace, love, unity and respect.
performing style of *Shining 3 Girls*). Brand-making via multimedia is one of the most effective strategies to promote image-producing products such as TV programs, movies and music. Since music is acoustic, it appeals mostly to the ear. And yet is can be seriously asked: is the enjoyment of music limited in this way? In what ways can listening to music also connect with the visual imaginations or to the visuality of music itself? To what extent do the eye and the ear complement each other? In this high tech age, the promotion of musical products needs to appeal as much to the pleasures of the visual, particularly through the mass media representations of the artists, including their images, actions and dancing, all of which are essential elements of techno music. Since techno underscores a harmonious communication between musical rhythm and physical movement to achieve physical and mental release, it is easier to catch and hold the audience’s attention using visual representations.

Techno music is distributed with the aid of transnational capital flows and advanced forms of technology, including TV, broadcasting stations, music videos and the Internet. The media has strategically labeled techno as “globally popular” in order to package it with an “always already” popular givenness, much like any famous brand product, to achieve genuine global popularity. For example, in order to propagandize techno, promoters will put tags on it such as “New Music Power” (音樂新勢力) and “New Fashion Guide” (流行新指標) to enchant consumers visually. In this way, they hope to make this type of music appear as though it exists already as a new global trend that is widely popular.

For a densely populated island like Taiwan, techno functions as a “yearning space” for listeners who seek physical and mental liberty. Since “seeing is believing,” the floating images associated with techno such as “fashion,” “freedom,” “avant-garde,” “progress,” “liberation” and “vigor” fulfills the audience’s transnational imagination. It makes them believe that they too are part of this “Global Techno Tribe”. As the well-known Taiwanese DJ @LLEN suggests, “We are the local kids who are creating a world of our own; our bodies are in Taiwan, yet our minds have already synchronized with the people of the global techno tribe, surfing in hyper space and time with computers and speeding
on the super highway of technology” (9). Acoustically as well as visually, techno creates a false image of a global community of equals, where everybody lives in a world of peace, love, unity and respect (P.L.U.R).

In this “time-space compressed” era of globalization, techno opens a transcendental space to compensate for the lack of those who live in a fragmented way in their everyday lives. The process of globalization has profoundly reorganized time and space. Spatial change in particular directly influences everyday life. Taiwan’s highly-populated living spaces have encountered a more drastic compressing and compartmenting because of this globalizing process. Bodily compression and pressures propel people in Taiwan to look for outlets, visually or acoustically, to release themselves. Techno usually adopts strong beats, high tempos and spacial music (空音) to create an illusory fantasy where the individual can enjoy unlimited freedom without constraint. As Sharon Zukin suggests, “Cultural activities are supposed to lift us out of the mire of our everyday lives and into the sacred spaces of ritualized pleasures” (1). In order to traverse cultural boundaries, techno needs to be promoted as a borderless form of popular music that everyone may access. By culturally universalizing techno music as a shared culture, international corporations have successfully turned techno into a form of the globally popular.

In this sense, techno now resists any attempt to be de-politicized as an “innocent” cultural expression; instead, we need to carefully examine the cultural economy of techno and its ideological re-formations. The consumption of techno, as the most popular form of music in many Western countries, makes one feel like a citizen of the First World, even in Taiwan, producing an ideal image of the global village for whoever “buys”. Techno not only creates an infinite sense of space but also evokes a cultural imagination of modernization and progress. Techno in this fantastic sense fulfills the global imaginary.

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9 This passage is quoted from the introduction of Electronic Bible of Dance Music 《電子聖經舞曲》. It’s written in Chinese and the English version is my own translation. Its original Chinese version says, 「我們是在創造我們自己的世界的在地仔，肉體在台灣，心靈卻已經在電腦超時空和資訊高速公路上與全球各地的電音族人同步」(9).

10 “Buy” used here carries two levels of meaning: the first means that you accept this music ideologically and thus internalize it. For example, we can say “I buy it” in English to mean that we take or accept it. The second sense is the more obvious one that means you spend money to purchase this type of music.
Dancing to techno at raves as a kind of performative ritual makes the participants feel as though they are part of one giant virtual reality.

Rather than actually releasing us from the everyday compression of our living space, consuming techno music may merely contain our desires. If we keep naturalizing techno as the music of the global popular without investigating its capitalist logic and the process of its ideological formation on the global scale, we may not be able to understand its insertion into the localities of the music landscapes of Taiwan.

The re-politicization of techno in its socio-economic context does not mean to deny these localities but rather to elaborate the complex relationship between the popularity of techno and the global cultural economy. Only through a critical examination of cultural complexity and power relations can the localities of music in Taiwan be understood. The music market in Taiwan is basically highly commercialized and relatively lacking in music uniqueness.\(^\text{11}\) To many, it seems that Taiwan does not have any contemporary popular music of its own but instead follows the trends of the American and Japanese music market. Taiwan’s pop music is practically led by the American music market. Even so, this does not entail the idea that the global music system is able to overwhelm any particular national music market and consume all its local varieties. Taiwan’s local music is not passively receiving whatever comes. As Robinson Campbell argues in *Music at the Margins*, the undeniable process of globalization and the invention of the transnational cooperation has caused the “commercialization of all aspects of life, combined into a demand for preservation of local cultural identity, a phenomenon we refer to as indigenization” (228). It is this blending of local elements and global taste that contributes to self-creation in the age of globalization. Techno in Taiwan consists of complicated local factors intricately converged, involving the music market, the music

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\(^{11}\) This statement is not to deny many Taiwan’s musical historical periods, including our Taiwanese music creations in the sixties or Chinese music creations in the forties. Most importantly, Taiwan’s folk music in the seventies is usually regarded as a significant historical period. See Chao-wei, Chang. *Who is singing his/her own songs: the history of folk music movement in Taiwan*. 張釗維：《誰在那邊唱自己的歌：台灣現代民歌運動史》. Nonetheless, since the 1980s, the music market has become more and more commercialized because of industrialization.
industry, consumer culture and gender politics. It is this absorption of local music elements and the adaptation of techno in Taiwan that has given birth to the vernacular music expression of Taiker Techno Music. Artists such as BOB (芭比姊妹), Jeannie Hsieh (謝金燕) and Shining 3 Girls (閃亮三姊妹) are three significant representatives of this form of music.

From the aspect of its musical components—especially, tempo, beat and lyric—Taiker Techno Music demonstrates some local differences. One of the most distinctive features of techno is its mechanical beat and tempo, with the stress on technical mixing, remixing and sampling rather than lyrics or performance. Taiker Techno Music, however, is better known for its colloquial, funny, and sometimes “obscene” Taiwanese or Mandarin Chinese lyrics, which represents an attempt to get close to the everyday life of the audience. Under careful examination, Taiker Techno Music reveals numerous familiar local objects, scenes and language expressions chosen to create a specifically Taiwanese cultural familiarity. These lyrics are usually easy to understand, direct and blatant, mostly related to the theme of love. The reason why Taiker Techno Music exhibits these characteristics is in order create a rapport with the cultural expressions and imaginations of its primary audience, which are the Taiker groups themselves and to make them as consumers identify with this music. For example, the Shining 3 Girls utilize local, colloquial and sensual lyrics to ensure that their songs are memorable and sexy.12

“When the mobile phone is ringing,
On this rainy afternoon,

You, big stupid head, big devil head,
big taro head, big pig head,
You are fooling me again…”

“Give Me Several Seconds”

“Come, come, come date me;

12 The translations of the Chinese and Taiwanese lyrics are the joint work of the author and the journal copy-editor.
I am your new babe.

Come, come, come date me;

This love story is playing tricks.

Come, come, come date me;

Never waste your youth.

Come, come, come date me;

you will regret it if you delay…”

“Come, Come Date Me”

“On fire, my whole body is burning for you,

On, on, on fire,

in the night when my mind goes crazy,

On fire this time, will you help me out?

On, on, on fire,

Would be different if you were with me…”

“Sparkling Glamour”

In addition to the colloquial nature of the lyrics, the songs often use Taiwanese vernacular words and expressions. Take “Pa” (帕) for instance. “Pa” is a local Taiwanese word whose meaning varies according to the contexts in which it is used. When someone’s style is described as “pa” or “pa li pa li” (帕里帕里) in Taiwanese, 13 it means that the person is very fashionable. In contrast, in the expression “pa-chi-a,” (帕妻仔) “pa” means “to court somebody”, and so “pa-chi-a” means “to court women”. A second example is the colloquial idiom, “Too many dinosaurs but few handsome guys.” The word

13 Such locally-specific languages are particularly used among Taikers.
“dinosaur”, widely used among the youth in Taiwan, metaphorically refers to ugly men or women. The lyrics of the group also make reference to such everyday objects as “Pearl Milk Tea.” In this way, the lyrics take advantage of Taiwan’s food culture to locate the music within a specific everyday social context.

“Polish your ten nails red,
put powder on your face
Put on perfume and go ‘pa-ing’…”

Wearing the shortest skirts and
the lowest-cut dresses to go ‘pa-ing’

(put on your sexiest dress
to hook up with somebody you
like) …”

“Go Pa-ing”

“Give me a cup of pearl milk tea,
and two straws stuck together.
Don’t you know that I am waiting?
Give me a cup of pearl milk tea,
and two hands held together.
Pearls are like my feelings,
always countless to you…”

“Pearl Milk Tea”

“Don’t be afraid, don’t be afraid, Count on me.
Too many dinosaurs but few handsome guys,
Prince Charming is missing.
As long as we support each other,
we will never become unwanted…”

“Count on Me”
These distinctively local characteristics elicit a set of “uncanny” feelings toward Taiker Techno Music, contrasting sharply with the typical image of techno as globalized. This contrast produces a kind of local intimacy for the global popular.

To understand this transformation of Techno, we need to consider Taiker Techno Music’s target consumers. These are the Taiwanese social group known as “Taikers”. It is the displacement of bourgeois cultural tastes by the Taikers that helps to explain the emergence of Taiker Techno Music. Those Taikers who listen to the music of *Shining 3 Girls* exhibit broad gender and class differences from the consumers of techno in the West. Consumers in the West have already acquired the cultural learning to appreciate techno, which is mostly a middle class taste, whereas in Taiwan, Taikers consist predominantly of lower middle class people who might be considered vulgar. In this way, the mystery is explained of why in order for Taiker Techno Music to be both culturally accessible and acceptable, it is necessary to utilize a set of colloquial and localized lyrics.

This local variant on techno is also related to the culture of KTV in Taiwan. KTV-going has become a common recreational pursuit for the Taiwanese people. Singing in a KTV is a way to release pressure and gain pleasure. Both enjoying oneself in a KTV and attending a rave party are means for becoming liberated through music. One sings with the music in a KTV and dance to the music at a rave party. This explains why the lyrics receive such emphasis in Taiker Techno Music but not in the original techno. At the moment, music corporations in Taiwan are cooperating closely with the KTV business as an effective marketing strategy to promote their music artists and products. The close connection is demonstrated by the fact that several *Shining 3 Girls* songs and other Taiker Techno such as *BOB* are listed as among the most frequently selected Top 20 in KTVs such as Cashbox (錢櫃), Holiday (好樂迪), V-mix and Hsiao Ao Chiang Hu

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14 Taikers in Taiwan are regarded by some as vulgar, but I prefer to use the term “folk”.
15 See “Leisure Politics: the pleasure and power relations in KTV” by Shu-mei Chang 〈休閒的政治 KTV的快感與權力關係〉 by 張淑玫 for related issues and further discussions about the leisure politics of KTV.
This example also shows how techno has managed to adopt itself to the local consumer culture of Taiwan.

Though influenced by house music, Taiker Techno Music is generally slower in rhythm. At the end of the 1980s, house music has become almost synonymous with dance music. It was from this point on that house music began to become more and more commercialized. “House music was developed by DJs in Chicago gay clubs during the late 1970s who used a technique known as blend mixing, where musical passages from existing recordings pressed on vinyl are ‘mixed’ together on a twin-turntable record player to produce new sounds and tonal textures (see Rietveld 1997); and, in some cases, entirely new songs or pieces of music (Bennett 119). House is generally seen as a metamorphosis of disco music, evolving into another form of dance music in which the music was re-mixed in different patterns using repetition to create a disordered sound. Even in the nineties, house music remained the major dance music for the “E-generation”, although it had evolved with various forms of development in beat, tempo and re-mixing techniques.

In Taiwan, Taiker Techno Music combines house music and techno by making certain changes in tempo, beat and remixing to demonstrate local variety. In the music of Shining 3 Girls, it is the vocals rather than the engineering re-mixing that gets stressed. Generally speaking, house music highlights the technical aspect of sampling by using digital technology instead of vocals, a technique known as “dub”. However, there is little “dub” in the songs of Shining 3 Girls. This is because the “dub” techniques tend to lessen the vocal performance, and thus disqualify it as music that is suitable for both dancing and singing. Local techno thus focuses on the vocals and slows down the tempo to make it more suitable for singing. If the beat becomes too fast, the song becomes unsuitable for singing for the average KTV-goer.

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16 Cashbox (錢櫃), Holiday (好樂迪), V-mix and Hsiao Ao Chiang Hu (笑傲江湖) are the four major KTV businesses in Taiwan. Hsiao Ao Chiang Hu even selects a “Powerful and Hot Dance Music” top 20; several songs of Shining 3 Girls are selected: “Queen Knight” (皇后騎士), “Go Pa-ing” and “Give Me Several Seconds.”

17 Dub is a skill to blank the vocal part and keep only the background music or rhythm.
Technology is another key factor explaining the development of techno in Taiwan. Simply put, without the technological development and widespread use of the computer, it would have been impossible for techno to thrive in the music environment of Taiwan. If there were synthesizers or electronic guitar, techno musicians would have been unable to do the mixing, re-mixing and sampling necessary. Taiwan’s high-tech industries have thus helped to boost techno in the local music market. Consumers too are familiar with high-tech products, creating a situation where there are many who are open-minded to techno.

Techno music frequently stresses its democratic character, offering itself as a demonstration that anyone can make their own music in whatever ways they like by means of digital technology. The democratization of music production aims not only to explode the conformity of music creation so as to diversify pop music but also to make the individual the creator of music according to his or her own lifestyle and taste. Many believe that there is greater potential for creativity in techno because high-tech products like computers help in the composition of various different versions of a particular piece of music. Each individual and each national community can create its own unique music style.

Nonetheless, this democratic theory has to come to terms with the specific issue brought about by technology, which has been termed the “digital divide.” For some individuals and national communities, the democratization of music illustrated by techno appears to be nothing more than an empty slogan. This is because they lack sufficient subsidies, technological equipment and expertise to afford this music. Instead of being democratic in the way its proponents claim, techno simply offers a new demarcation of groups in terms of ethnicity, class and gender. The musician Chung-hua Ni (倪重華), for example,

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18 Places that lack a high-tech material infrastructure along the lines of Taiwan will have greater difficulty in creating a techno music culture. In low-tech global regions, a lack of media literacy and reproduction techniques make techno music less profitable in the eyes of entrepreneurs. While Taiwan’s music market has undoubtedly been changed by the arrival of techno, the music market has been able to appropriate “actively” techno’s musical elements to enrich itself. Learning from the lucrative global experience, Taiwan’s music industry welcomes techno warmly.
has said, “the sound of computer is now the natural sound in the young generation” (7). This observation may account for certain issues relating to age, but it leaves unanswered those that relate to region, gender and class.

Ⅲ. THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED: REVISITING GENDER AND CLASS IN TAIKER TECHNO MUSIC

As Stuart Hall reminds us, “the global post-modern … trying to live with, and at the same moment, overcome, sublate, get hold of, and incorporate difference” (33). The global popularity of Techno also demands incorporation, absorption and adaptation. The local transformations embodied in the music of Shining 3 Girls clearly demonstrate so-called “local differences.” But these local differences are not an aspect of the music and its markets. The performance of the body in the case of Shining 3 Girls also allows for the rethinking of gender and class.

The emergence of the “Electronic Float” in the 1950s in Taiwan, which was initially decried as a form of moral decay, was actually an industry important to the well-being of Taiwan’s economy as well as being a vernacular cultural expression. At funerals, weddings or temple fairs (廟會), the “Electronic Float” would appear to warm up the ceremonies of celebration or mourning. Due to this obligation, the Electronic Float performers would cry and singing or “play” (both in the sense of music and in the sense of bodily play), depending on the occasion. The Electronic Float was divided into several different types for a variety of specific functions. According to Chiung-hsia Chang (張瓊霞), the performing team consisted of an emcee, some singers, strippers, show girls, magicians and filial daughters (孝女). Each of these would adjust their performance to meet the needs of each rite (39). According to Chang, the increasing popularity of the Electronic Float was maintained from the 1970s until Tung-min Hsieh (謝東閔), the leader of Taiwan province (省主席), outlawed these folk activities in 1987. Since making

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19 Please see The Electronic Bible of Dance Music 《電子聖經舞曲》. The original Chinese is 電腦的聲音是現在年輕世代的自然聲。
Taiwan modernized along Western lines was the first priority of the government, “vulgar” forms of folk culture, including the culture of the Electronic Float, needed to be eradicated. In particular, the female nudity during funeral rites, weddings and temple fairs was considered controversial. Was it truly religious or merely obscene? The prohibition of such performances was undertaken because government officials regarded it as a form of moral degeneration in a supposedly progressive society like Taiwan.

Since the members of Shining 3 Girls were once Electronic Float Girls (電子花車女郎), their performances and style has clearly been influenced by a major aspect of traditional Taiwanese culture. The Electronic Float (電子花車) and techno (電子舞曲) both using electronic devices, which in Chinese is called Tien-tzu (電子). The performance of the Electronic Float relies on the use of the electronic piano, while techno requires a synthesizer. Though Electronic Float performances have been regarded as degenerate, the technical application of the electronic piano signifies a form of progress, at least technologically. The use of electronic instruments in both performing cultures serves the common purpose of catharsis. Both techno at rave parties and the performance of the Electronic Float at traditional rituals are intended for liberations or soul-healings. For the purpose of catharsis, the bodily movements and the tempo of music have to be correspondingly balanced. In other words, the body has to sway with the beat harmoniously. This is because the performance of the body has significant symbolic meaning in the rituals. It is generally believed that only when the rituals are performed through bodily movements like waving or running or waving that the invocation to God can be worked out.

From the intertextual relationship between techno and the Electronic Float in Taiwan, it becomes possible to understand why most Taiker Techno performers are female. In her essay, “Is Local: Global as Feminine: Masculine? Rethinking the Gender of Globalization,” Carla Freeman poses a question about the gendering of globalization. Some critics have seen globalization as a “masculine” phenomenon, metaphorically positioned as a penetrating force in relation to the “virgin lands” of the local. What Freeman attempts to do is to challenge this division. It is evident that the cultural space of
techno is still male-dominated. For instance, most Western rave DJs are still men, even though more women DJs are emerging. The presence of *Shining 3 Girls*, however, challenges the gender divisions of the globalization process. The combinations of techno, the Betel-Nut-Beauty style of dress, the showgirl or stripteaser dancing, the local accents, and the multi-lingual lyrics (Chinese, Taiwanese, Hakka and English) all converge to make *Shining 3 Girls* a peculiarly important set of female performers. The global convergence exemplified by *Shining 3 Girls* opens greater space for female agency. One reason is that it is too challenging for men to combine the various elements of this particular style: the Electronic Float performance, the striptease dance and the Betel Nut Beauty mode of dress.

From the perspective of cultural feminists, the performance of *Shining 3 Girls* might be seen as a form of the objectification of the female body. However, instead of seeing the group as objects of the male gaze, I consider their “self-manipulation” of body performance as the empowerment of women and the self-mastery of sexuality. Self-mastery is a key ability both for the Electronic Float girls and for striptease artists. To make a successful performance, these female performers need to have everything and everyone under their control. They must ensure that they accurately choreograph their own singing, dancing and bodily style. In this respect, the dancing of *Shining 3 Girls* is extremely powerful, with the group responsible for designing its own dance routines. They know exactly how to “play” with their bodies rather than just “display” their bodies. The viewers can certainly feast their eyes upon *Shining 3 Girls*, but they cannot take the control. According to Josephine Ho (何春蕤), who has undertaken field observation of erotic dancers and striptease artists in Taiwanese pubs, the performers occupy the leading position during the whole show. This is because with their dexterity, they know how to master and manipulate the performance site, which is their workplace and a space for bodily movement. As Ho suggests, this interactive practice and physical self-mastery

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20 In Chinese, Betel Nut Beauties, or Betel Nut Girls, are called “Binlang Xishi” (檳榔西施). Dressed in bikinis or thongs, these young girls sit in a glass booth, often decorated by neon lights, on the sides of roads and freeways to sell betel nuts and drinks.

21 *Shining 3 Girls* are Hakka people. They are also the hosts of a Hakka TV program called “His Mei An Ching.” This means “Miss (His Mei) Beautiful (An Ching).”
creates “heterotopias” for these girls (175-77). This gender discourse has opened alternative cultural space for discussions about body politics and brought new possibilities for female performance such as *Shining 3 Girls*.

The popularity of *Shining 3 Girls’* should not be ascribed exclusively to this focus on the body. In fact, their popularity also results from their accessibility, which includes their music, style and class. This is because they are seen as representing the cultural style of the folk, one that is closer to the everyday life of the public than it is to elite cultural taste. What is more, their amazing ability to warm up live shows has won them more attention. At computer exhibitions, they have been frequently invited to make people gather around the stands. Due to their experience working with the Electronic Float, they have usually been highly successful at this. From time to time too, they have been chosen to be advocates for online games by major computer companies. Consequently, the penetration of techno as the global popular does not sweep out the local. Instead, the coming of techno leads to the return of the repressed vernacular culture of the Electronic Float. It has offered the chance to experiment with different styles and yielded new possibilities for female performers to exhibit more power.

The Electronic Float performance is both live and place-bound, allowing the performers to have real interactions with the viewers. In contrast, the music and performance of *Shining 3 Girls* on TV or in music videos are technologically mediated and reproduced. But as Walter Benjamin argues, “man has to operate with his whole living person, yet forgoing its aura. For aura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica of it” (229). In other words, while it is possible to celebrate the popularization of culture at the mechanical age, it is necessary to consider also that the aura of live performance might be lost.

Media has the power to erase locality by such means as misrepresentation, ideological stereotyping and over-commercialization. Nonetheless, it is impossible to deny that the development of technology has already changed our lives and our forms of cultural reproduction. If media and technology are considered to be totally negative, a number of
important opportunities for re-presenting both culture and locality in the age of information and technology may be lost. In this sense, advanced technology is significant in that it gives people the opportunity to develop these local cultures when encountering the forces of globalization. The once-disappearing performance culture of the Electronic Float has now regained public attention and cultural value through the combination of the media and technology in the performances of *Shining 3 Girls*.

And while it is true that they may face censorship and the disappearance of the “aura” when doing performance via media, the phenomena that is *Shining 3 Girls* nonetheless represents an important space for local folk culture and its resources. The wide exposure of this group through the media and live interactions with audience goad us to re-examine folk culture seriously. With the help of technological progress, it may be possible yet to bring local culture to the world and to re-activate the local in pop music.

IV. CONCLUSION: THE RE-ACTIVATION OF THE LOCAL

Local resistance now seems necessary in response to the invasion of globalization. Techno as the global popular carries a powerful flow of capital, imagery and ideology, but local resistance is not the only way out. Instead, the utilization of local differences should be reexamined. The convergence of techno, a product of the middle class, and the Electronic Float, widely regarded as a product of the lower orders, in the performances of *Shining 3 Girls* illustrates the activation of importance of local difference. The transformation of techno into Taiker Techno Music provides a critical opportunity to re-assess the dialectic of the global and the local. In particular, the return of the Electronic Float in new guise evidenced in the performances of *Shining 3 Girls* offers the opportunity to reassess the values of Taiwan’s vernacular or folk culture in the era of globalization. Taiker Techno Music should not be regarded simply as local resistance but rather as a local culture with global potential.

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22 *Shining 3 Girls* continued to participate in performances at computer displays, campuses, weddings and temple fairs, even after they became stars.
WORKS CITED


