Remediating Japanese Dramas:1
Exploring the Politics of Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in Loser-Dog Queen2 in Taiwan

The concept of cultural imperialism used to describe the imposition of American popular culture around the globe in the 1960s has been replaced by the concept of globalization since the 1980s and 1990s. Following the notion of cultural imperialism, many have viewed globalization as homogenization which erases cultural diversities, as in the McDonaldization of the world (Ritzer 1), or as dissemination of “structures of common difference” in that globalization, the commodification of cultural difference in a predictable way (Wilk 117). Others, however, highlight the disorienting “disjunctures” and the multidirectional nature of global flows (Appadurai 40-41). Many scholars developed theories of “globalization as hybridization” (Pieterse 45) or glocalization, "the simultaneity and interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local, or... the universal and the particular” (Robertson 30), to demonstrate the empirical fact of the simultaneous interpenetration and incorporation of the local and the global. The latter “disjunctive” view allows for a reconceptualization of the rise of Asian popular culture as the “decentering” of globalization which repositions the assumption of a monolithic, unidirectional (transnational) economic and cultural flow that emanates from West to East, North to South (Iwabuchi 35)

Most scholarship on East Asian popular culture demonstrates the “de-Westernized” pattern of cultural production, circulation, and consumption, even though American influence is still central (Iwabuchi 198-200). One primary concern in this scholarship is how inter-Asian circulation of media culture promotes mutual
understanding and self-reflexive dialogues in a transnational space (Iwabuchi 201; Chua 117). While there is a celebration of the connections and the possible formation of an East Asian identity through popular culture, Koichi Iwabuchi cautions, “Inter-Asia media circulation is not just about cross-border connection, but about cross-border disparity, division, antagonism, and marginalization in various overlapping way” (206). Critical cultural analysis should pay more attention to textual analysis which asks, “What kind of mutual understandings are predominantly promoted through which media texts and whose voices and which issues are not included and/or shared in the emerging inter-Asian cultural public sphere” and “whether and how transnationally consumed texts in East Asia do justice to cultural differences, inequality and marginalization of each nation” (206). Iwabuchi’s call for critical textual analysis of cultural difference is an urgent corrective to the industry- and consumption-based study of Asian pop culture; however, his question of whether texts do justice to cultural difference forecloses the question of radical constructivism; instead of taking differences as pre-existing categories in judging the accuracy of distortion of images, cultural differences/identities should be conceptualized as constructed through culture/texts. The point at issue is how cultural differences are constructed and whether these constructions do justice to minority groups. The Taiwanese television drama, *Loser-Dog Queen*, provides a fruitful case to explore the politics of difference, in particular, gender, class and ethnic politics. *Loser-Dog Queen*, a drama about a top girl’s (a girl who excels in her career) search for love and marriage in urban Taipei, is an inter-Asian media text in the sense that its content contains “remediation” of Japanese TV dramas, Japanese bestsellers, American postfeminism, and Taiwanese “reality”, and it is widely circulated and consumed in Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, and, to a lesser extent, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines ("Introduction").
The concept of mediation and remediation, proposed by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin and William Mazzarella allows an analysis that foregrounds the processes of cultural formation. Mazzarella points out that both theories of cultural imperialism and its reversed theories of hybridity, cultural proximity, and glocalization rely on a substantialist model of culture which fails to consider culture as “at one and the same time, ideology and social process, as something continuously made and remade through constantly shifting relations, practices, and technologies of mediation” (355). To get out of the impasse of these opposing views on culture and globalization, he calls for attention to the process of mediation as the loci of cultural politics. Media, according to Mazzarella, “make society imaginable to itself” (357). Through media and mediation, we establish our intimate relationships with the social world; however, dictated by the “logic of transparent immediacy” which appeals to authenticity, the process of mediation is neutralized and denied. Heeding the process of mediation allows us to unpack culture and identities as processes that are stabilized through ideologies, but also presented as constructed fictions. Bolter and Grusin further point out that mediation is remediation. Contemporary media is defined by remediation, that is, how each medium “responds, redeployes, competes with and reforms other media” (55). In this sense, remediation is “mediation of mediation”; it remediates other media. But remediation also (re)mediates the real as well as reforms the real (55-6). To appear as authentic to certain groups of people at a particular historical context, the media must incorporate certain elements from reality as well as other media. Through reality-making, the media is thus able to deny the process of mediation in making identities and culture natural and neutral.

Theories of mediation and remediation lay emphasis on these questions: what are the conditions of possibilities that enable the mediation of Loser-Dog Queen? What transnational elements from Japan and America can be remediated? What are
excluded? What are the Taiwanese realities that are remediated to create a sense of the real? Whose reality? What identities are made and what are excluded in the remediation process? What are the gender, class and ethnic politics that are involved in this process of mediation and remediation? These questions call attention to the politics of the localization of intersecting transnational cultural flows and highlight “a web of power plays, agonistic interests, pluralized histories, and struggles over polysemous and asymmetrical exchanges” (Dissanayake 25). In the case of Taiwan, the mediation and remediation perspective leads to an argument that the logic of global capital works with Japanese colonial legacy, American postfeminism, local patriarchy, and national ethnic/class politics in ways that marginalize cultural difference and reinforce existing power hierarchy.

**Idol Dramas and the Logic of Capital**

*Loser-Dog Queen* is an idol drama, a drama genre which promotes idols through urban love stories and uses idol power to sell products. It is a genre that originates from Japanese trendy drama and is now seen as a significant "national brand" due to its capacity for generating profits from the Asian Market. The emergence of idol dramas in Taiwan since the 1990s needs to be situated within the uneven cultural flow between Japan and Taiwan as a result of Japanese colonialism and later, American hegemony which enables Japan to be the economic leader of East Asian countries, and the logic of global capital.

Leo Ching uses “Give Me Japan and Nothing Else!,” a headline from a Taiwanese newsweekly, to illustrate the strong desire that the Taiwanese have for Japanese trendy dramas. Ching contends that this desire for “becoming Japanese” should be conceptualized as both a desire for modernity and a desire for an independent nation. The desire for modernity expresses a deep-seated inferiority complex as a result of colonization and should be seen as the desire to be equal to the
Japanese in order to escape the exploitative colonial structure (Ching 782).

The desire for a Taiwanese nation, however, is a different story. After the Second World War, with the support of the United States, the Kuomintang (KMT) authoritarian regime began a process of re-colonization through de-Japanization and re-Sinicization. The de-Japanization project, implemented through banning the Japanese language and Japanese cultural products, however, did not succeed in eliminating the Japanese presence in people’s daily lives. Instead, re-Sinicization led to the desire for Taiwan’s independence, which was transformed into “becoming Japanese”—to identify with the Japanese in order to eliminate Chineseness from national identity formation.

The dissatisfaction with the KMT regime and the search for Taiwanese consciousness in place of Chineseness has impelled the democratization process since the late 1970s, along with high economic growth brought about by American-led, Japanese-supported export-oriented economic policies. In the realm of television, the push for democratization converged with economic (neo)liberalization. In 1993, Taiwan legalized cable television and lifted the ban on Japanese audio-visual products. The result was a proliferation of American, Japanese, and local channels, and this created a great demand for various programs. Taiwan’s television industry, realizing its historically deep-seated “desire for Japan,” actively sought to collaborate with the Japanese television industry to import and promote Japanese programs.

The popularity of Japanese trendy dramas in the early 90s, which created the first young generation of mass culture “Japanophiles” (ha-ri zu) in Taiwan, testified to Taiwan’s desire for Japan as a desire for modernity. Trendy dramas, for the Taiwanese, are showcases of modern ways of living. In Japan, trendy dramas usually feature young and beautiful actors and actresses and depict their lives in the city of Tokyo, including work, love, friendship as well as various social concerns. The average
length of trendy dramas ranges from 10 to 12 episodes, and the dramas are broadcast in the “golden television slot.” Product placement is central to the genre as these shows introduce lifestyle products and leisure pursuits to the audiences (Su 1).

In importing trendy dramas, Taiwan’s television industry “regenerifies” them into “idol dramas” by selecting those with a proven record of popularity in Japan with an exclusive focus on urban romance. The industry uses promotional strategy that centers on the profits that idols generate. As such, three criteria are identified by the industry as the defining features of idol drama: “casting (idol), urban romance, and ratings (profits)” (Su 77) The success of idol dramas enabled the Taiwanese television industry to follow suit. In creating local idol dramas, the television industries initially relied on scripts from Japan or copycat imitations; however, as Taiwan became more adept at telling urban love stories, more local scripts were created, even though many still look to Japanese dramas as sources of remediation.

In addition, the logic of capital further influences the way the nation is imagined through branding idol drama as “national.” Since early 2000, many Asian countries followed the British model to promote culture creative industries. In this model, culture is not only seen as an expediency for generating capital but also as representing national power. In Taiwan, the popularity of Japanese dramas ignited much concern over the loss of Taiwan's cultural autonomy and the resurgence of Japanese colonization. However, with the popularity of the Taiwanese-produced, Japanese-scripted idol drama, Meteor Garden, in Asia, idol drama was constructed as initiating the “Chinese Wave,” leading the Taiwanese to “fight back” against Japan (Ma 82). Moreover, as China was discursively constructed as the largest market in Asia, idol drama, with its use of the Mandarin language, is seen as quality drama deserving government investment because of its capacity to reach the Chinese market,
as opposed to the “vulgar” indigenous dramas which use mostly local languages (Yang 285-286). Through the rhetoric of capital, idol drama positions itself as representing the Chinese nation in Taiwan; however, this nation is promulgated by the KMT government which privileges the Mandarin-speaking population at the expense of the Taiwanese-speaking population. Herein lies the ethnic/class politics created by the KMT government’s Chinese nation-building. It is significant that the formation of the idol drama genre is embedded in unequal power dynamics both nationally and internationally. These unequal relationships are inscribed in the mediation and remediation of *Loser-Dog Queen*.

**The Mediation of Japanese "Realities" in Japanese Trendy Dramas**

*Loser-Dog Queen* remediates three Japanese cultural texts on single women, also known as "loser dogs": *Makeinu No Tooboe (The Far-Reaching Barking Sound of Loser Dogs)*, written by Junko Sakai, and two Japanese dramas, *Monster Parent* and *Around Forty* ("Yang Jin-hua" 30).

The intersection of nationalism, patriarchy, and neoliberal capitalism forms the primary context for mediation in Japanese single-women trendy dramas. First, patriarchal social convention dictates a woman’s worth to be measured in terms of marriage. However, Japanese men prefer to marry women with three “lows”—low in capacity for career development, education, and age—characteristics which enable them to satisfy their egos as protectors. Second, capitalism enables a few top women to occupy powerful positions while creating a huge pool of poorly-paid, insecure temporary positions for the majority of young women. The workplace becomes the site for single women to find their husbands. Finally, the institution of neoliberalism within the context of conservatism in Japan in the 1980s allows Japanese nationalists to critique neoliberal ethics in the name of an human(ity)-centered Japanese spirit (Reitan). This nationalist discourse takes on the form of the feminine, embodied by
the single woman’s dream to devote herself to the society, thereby serving patriarchal interests while mitigating the equalizing potential that capitalism offers to women.

Junko Sakai in *Makeinu No Tooboe* points out that Japanese society uses marriage as a yardstick to measure a woman's worth; therefore, single women are considered Loser Dogs and married women Winner Dogs. Single women, however, are social losers with economic power. To mask their “lack,” they use fashion to show the world that they are living a good life. This figure—bright and capable, beautiful and fashionable—becomes the prototype of single woman in Japanese dramas and is remediated in the Taiwanese *Loser- Dog Queen*. For example, in the beginning episode of *Around Forty*, titled “Am I Pitiably?”, the show makes the claim that happiness, for the single woman, is affording the pleasures that certain kinds of lifestyles offer, such as going to fancy restaurants and enjoying hot spring baths.

Despite consumerist pleasures, single women have to negotiate with the dominant social ideal of marriage as the defining criterion for happiness. Thus, a woman’s agency is defined through her personal choice of love/marriage or/and career. One repeated theme in *Around Forty* is, as articulated by the female protagonist, Satoko, “I am in charge of my own destiny.” As women’s “bildungsroman,” the “I” as a subject of enunciation is narrated through two decisions which lead to her self-discovery. The first decision regards her choice of marriage for marriage’s sake or marriage for true love and true self. The second decision is between career and marriage. Though Satoko eventually chooses her career as a psychiatrist, love and career are not mutually exclusive as the show ends with a promising note, implying her romantic possibility with the male protagonist, Okamura Keitaro, in the future.

The notion of career in Japanese dramas usually assumes a feminine (and nationalist) form in the sense that it is always the caring and human-centered (collective) aspect that is accentuated: Satoko’s dream is to take care of her patients
while Itsuki in *Monster Parent* has been transformed from a cold-blooded corporate lawyer to a caring woman responsible for the well-being of the society. And at the end, it is their persistence in their caring role to serve the society that has won them the possibility of a marriage.

How is this mediation of Japanese “reality” remediated in Taiwan’s *Loser-Dog Queen*? What are the elements that are remediated? What are excluded? What are the local realities that come to mediate this remediation? What are the cultural politics of this remediation?

**Remediating Japanese Dramas: Top Girls and Urban Romance**

Three (trans)local mechanisms mediate *Loser-Dog Queen*’s remediation of Japanese dramas: the logic of capital, (trans)local postfeminism, and ethnic/class common sense image. As an idol drama, *Loser-Dog Queen* is, first of all, dictated by the profit motive. It aims to capture the niche of single top girls in Taiwan who have come to occupy the “spaces of attention,” in Angela McRobbie’s term, in the global market. This “top girl” niche is a convergence of various local and transnational forces. First, this group of women should be seen as the product of the intersection of a transformed global capitalism which demands women’s emotional labor in a service economy as well as the state’s effort to pursue capital while regulating the moral order of gender through labor-friendly gender mainstreaming policies. Second, the top girls are constructed by advertising discourses as powerful consumers. They are viewed as those who “have money and leisure and are concerned about lifestyle, taste, name-brands, and fashion” and “who are willing to invest in themselves and see happiness as more important than money” (Zheng 14). In fact, the term Queen refers to women who are willing to spend money on beauty products as a way of pampering themselves. It originates from the infomercial TV show, *Queen*, which functions as an advertising forum for beauty products.
While neoliberal globalization also created a huge pool of temporary workers and low-skilled service and factory workers, most of them women, *Loser-Dog Queen*, however, decides to tell stories of single top girls to the exclusion of the majority of temp girls—a subject of concern in many Japanese dramas such as *Dispatch* (Haken no Hinkako) which examines the tough economic conditions, including the conflicts between regular workers and temp workers, that temp workers face. The regenrification from trendy drama to idol drama involves a refocus of attention to celebrity-centered consumption and urban romance, which leads *Loser-Dog Queen* to adapt *Monster Parent*, a show about the transformation of a woman from a selfish successful corporate lawyer to a compassionate legal consultant for a school, and *Around Forty*, a show about three women's life choices about marriage and work, to a “top girl seeking younger Mr. Right romance,” or, to use local slang, an “elder sister and younger brother romance” (jie di lian).

The logic of capital which underlies the idol drama genre fits perfectly well with (trans)local postfeminism. Postfeminism and neoliberalism share intimate relations. According to Rosalind Gill, postfeminism and neoliberalism “both appear to be structured by a current of individualism that has replaced almost entirely notions of the social or political, or any idea of the individual as subject to pressure, constraints or influence from outside themselves” (164). Second, the neoliberal subject as autonomous, calculating, self-regulating “bears strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism” (164). The individualism which underlies the neoliberal, postfeminist subject enables an articulation of female individualization with femininity and consumption.

In travelling to Taiwan, this American discourse of postfeminism remediated the local “strong woman” discourse which emerged in the mid-80s as women began to join the workforce. The strong woman discourse is shot with contradictions. On the
one hand, “The Strong Woman”, as represented in Chu Xiu-Chuan's 1984 bestseller, articulates a new type of competitive woman who devotes her life to her career while being rewarded with a husband who accommodates her ambitions; on the other hand, the strong woman is constructed as “a masculine woman, a woman who is self-centered and who lacks tenderness and obedience” (Wen 8). Coexisting with this strong woman discourse is a proliferation of guidebooks such as “Manual for Strong Women” which regulate women to become “feminine and tender, but not weak... fashionable and elegant” (Wen 9).

Mediated by the conservative patriarchal force, the translation of American postfeminism to Taiwan since the 90s transformed the strong woman into the “tender woman,” evidenced by Chu Xiu-Chuan's 1995 sequel to “The Strong Woman, ” “I Transformed the Strong Woman into the Tender Woman.” The opening up of the workplace to women facilitates a discourse of female individualization in which women are seen as equals to men. But the patriarchal discourse of femininity and beauty comes to mediate this postfeminist discourse of individualization and connects it to the new culture of global consumer capitalism, resulting in the (re)definition of female individuality through her choice of consumption and men.

The articulation of (trans)local postfeminism and idol drama genre plays a key role in structuring the politics of remediation in Loser-Dog Queen. Central to the success of idol drama is the notion of the star as individual, with an emphasis on Yang Jin-hua as a glamorous and fashion-conscious single woman in and outside the show. Adapted from the figure of Itsuki in Monster Parent—a competitive and self-centered woman who cares about nothing but winning—the female protagonist, Shan Wu-Shuan, introduces herself in the beginning of the show: “I am Shan Wu-shuan, a 33 year-old woman who outshines everybody. I have a successful career, a quality lifestyle... Life is only worth living as long as I move forward with all my might. But
is it so?” Mediated by the local discourse of strong woman as a problem to be regulated and disciplined, Wu-shuan is constructed as a masculine woman and her “masculinity” is the cause of her unpopularity. From her colleague’s point of view, “She has no life, no friends, but work. She works like a man and is as capable as a man. Indeed, she is a man in dress” (episode 1). Her capacity makes her unfeminine (“How can she be a woman if she is incapable of caring for others?”) and thus, equal to a man. However, the “But is it so?” questions her success in her career as true happiness, enabling the disciplining of the strong woman by shifting the focus to a female journalist’s quest for romance.

While Around Forty deals with three women's life experiences and brings out problems that both single and married women face in negotiating family, work, and women's individuality, Loser-Dog Queen eliminates married women's concerns in negotiating patriarchy and individuality. Instead, it remediates only Satoko’s story of pursuing romance with a younger, less established man. With postfeminism as a mediating mechanism, the two choices that make up Satoko’s individuality are emphasized and extended into the major obstacles that a romance has to overcome in order for the couple to reach a happy ending. Wu-shuan’s first choice is between her ex-boyfriend who was sophisticated and well-established, and the much younger Lucas, who was her assistant but who was the only man who understands her “true self” as tender and pure, despite her masculine mask. After about fifteen episodes of these two men competing, and literally fighting, for Wu-shuan, the heroine decides that Lucas is her true love. The subject of choice, Wu-shuan, through the media industry’s manipulation, becomes “real.” The female audiences are encouraged to choose for Wu-shuan by voting online. Through the constitution of a subject of love and in love, both the fictional character and real audiences are now made into subjects of choice.
Like *Around Forty*, the second choice between one’s true self and love/marriage is not mutually exclusive, but complementary. In *Around Forty*, age difference as a problem was quickly resolved as far as love is concerned; in *Loser-Dog Queen*, age difference becomes a major obstacle. The “three low” patriarchal society causes much pressure on the couple, with the man beginning his career while the woman is facing the ticking of her biological clock with much anxiety. After much soul-searching, she finally overcomes the social pressure for an immediate marriage and supports Lucas’ plan to study in America. This discovery of the true self through the letting-go decision achieves two ends. On the one hand, Lucas grows into a “real” man who has the power and money to provide her with a good life; on the other, in finding her true self, Wu-shuan is finally feminized—she gives up her competitive editor-in-chief position in favor of a less powerful job, but a more “balanced” life which involves leisure and consumption.

In both *Monster Parent* and *Around Forty*, the workplace—the primary site in which the heroes and heroines interact with society—represents how neoliberal capitalism currently operates in Japan. These shows function as a critique of the profit-oriented capitalist system in that both Itsuki and Satoko eventually opt for a more humane and cooperative work environment where human values, not profit and competition, matter most. The transformation of the female self that these dramas elaborate allegorizes the spirit of Japan. This feminized self as Japan echoes many Japanese nationalists’ desire to place Japan as a linkage between America and the rest of Asia, through a rhetoric of Japan’s uniqueness—“human value”—in realizing its colonial desire, as Sony’s ex-CEO, Idei Nobuyuki, states: “I think Asia is the place for Japan to realize its full potential... Participating in the project of saving Asian countries and coping environmental crisis can awaken the world to focus on Japan’s significance again” (Idei 25-9). However, in idealizing Japan through idealizing the
feminine qualities of women, women are again assigned to the realm of the caring role, leaving masculine aggressiveness (in the form of colonial expansion in the past or current regional domination) unquestioned.

If Taiwan’s remediation of Japanese dramas prioritizes love and consumption to constitute an “inter-Asian” media text, the question of nationalism and capitalism, manifested in the form of “society,” is eliminated. With the mediation of (trans)local postfeminism which eradicates the social, the society as portrayed through the workplace is reduced to love. One example is typical. To compete for the cover story, Wu-shuan digs up a prominent politician’s love affair with her high school teacher, although he is reputed to be a “family man who is devoted to his wife.” Eventually, with the help of Lucas, she succeeds in demanding that the politician forfeit his candidacy as a prime minister while giving up her scoop to protect her high school teacher’s privacy. She explains her motivation: “I do this in the name of love. I can never tolerate any man who betrays love” (episode 3). Here, a top journalist’s search for social justice, for informing the public about a politician’s infidelity and graft is reduced to an act of defending true love. Moreover, her “humane” act of protecting her teacher’s privacy—the first dramatic event to transform her tough and competitive personality—is inspired by Lucas. It is Lucas who teaches her what sincerity and humanity means.

In remediating Japanese dramas, *Loser-Dog Queen* demonstrates that the articulation of postfeminism and idol drama genre privileges a mode of female individualization accomplished through romance to the exclusion of the social and the political. This adaptation is explained through the intersection of patriarchy and capitalism.

Capitalism allows for the rise of “woman power,” expressed through the discourse of individualism and choice within the framework of romance and
consumption. The narration of a “subversive” “elder-sister and younger-brother love” allows women a sense of power because of their age/experience and capacity as men’s boss. This empowerment of women is what Teresa Ebert calls, “bigendered subjectivity.” “Bigendered subjectivity is the site where the economic order puts patriarchy under pressure, forcing it to allow some shifting of gendered features to meet transformations in the relations of production and the fluctuating labor needs of capitalism” (36). But capitalism cannot grant women full freedom to become completely bigendered. “Individuals are permitted to occupy bigendered subject positions—to take on limited attributes of the other gender—only to the degree that is specifically required by current relations of production and only so far as the primacy of male gender is not substantially threatened” (36).

Women’s power needs to be tamed through feminization in order that women become complementary and subordinate to men, thereby ensuring the successful reproduction of hetero-patriarchy. If the narration of an unconventional pair allows women to occupy the dominant position, the traditional romance formula guarantees the reproduction of the feminine through the narration of female desire for the male phallus. This desire for the phallus is what Teresa de Lauretis calls, “desire in narrative” (133). Even in the women’s genre, the narrative is ultimately about the active desire of “what does a man want?” masked under the guise of “what does a woman want?” In Loser-Dog Queen, male phallic power is achieved through, first of all, women’s desire for men and marriage. This is demonstrated through the question of “But is it so?—a question that exposes single women’s “lack,” despite their power, and demands a conventional answer that women’s happiness be obtained through a male partner. Second, the male phallus can only be achieved when women become feminized. Unlike other people who see Wu-shuan as a “masculine woman,” Lucas is the only one who understands her to be feminine and tender from the start. This is
why Lucas wins Wu-shuan’s heart at the end. The feminization of Wu-shuan ensures the reproduction of heterosexual desire. Moreover, feminization enables Wu-shuan to give up her ambition and settle for a mediocre position. Finally, male phallic power needs to be asserted over and over again. In *Loser-Dog Queen*, Lucas constantly plays the role of rescuer/protector for Wu-shuan. He saves her from embarrassment when her colleagues shame her, he helps her finish her job, takes care of her when she does not have a place to stay, and finally, he goes abroad to get a degree so that he can become a traditional breadwinner to compensate for the age difference. As such, this story is, after all, the story of a man. While the top girl’s agency is manifested only through her choice of love, the ultimate transformation lies in the male protagonist, Lucas, who transforms from a young boy to a real man, thus gaining Wu-shuan’s love and finally realizing “the desire in narrative.”

Teresa Ebert points out romance’s constant reproduction of female desire for the male sexual partner as representative of the phallus as the very ground of patriarchy itself:

> By desiring the male/phallus, the female subject… continually reproduces the phallus as the privileged signifier around which all signification—including her own subjectivity—circulates. She thereby repeatedly locates herself in the secondary subject position of gendered other—the not male, the one lacking the phallus, power and privilege. Through the operation of desire, ideology produces the female as the willing (desiring) agent of her own engendering and the linchpin of patriarchy. (44)

**National “Reality” and the Common Sense Image of Ethnicity/Class**

The third local mechanism, the “common sense image” of ethnicity/class, brings into focus how the national "reality" intersects with gender politics in ways that reinforce existing power structures. James Curran and Myung-Jin Park point out that
not only are TV productions regulated by national policies, they are also largely made for domestic audiences (11-12). As such, the national constitutes a significant site for mediation. However, in inter-Asian media texts such as *Loser-Dog Queen*, which are fundamentally about romance, the "national" can only be best approached from marginal characters and subplots. If in Japanese dramas, the national is produced through the metaphoric feminine figure to (re)position Japan as the center of Asia, Taiwan’s “national reality,” with its history of colonization by the Dutch, Japanese, and then by the Chinese-centered Nationalist (KMT) government, does not lay claim to such a privileged and ambitious position. As a state without nation, currently burdened by the conflicting Chinese-centered and Taiwanese-centered national identities, ethnic/class politics becomes a significant site of struggle for what the national is in Taiwan’s politics.

The historical formation of ethnic/class politics provides us with a background in understanding how they are mediated in *Loser-Dog Queen*. The 228 massacre in 1947, which aimed to suppress local dissidents against the authoritarian Nationalist government, was a significant event in making Taiwan’s ethnicity into Waishengren (outside province people, the mainlanders who came to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek after WWII) and Benshengren (inside province people, those who lived in and emigrated to Taiwan before 1945). The Nationalist regime’s discriminating political, economic, cultural, linguistic, and educational policies, which favored Waishengren and excluded local Taiwanese, further consolidated the Benshengren/Waishengren ethnic divide (Wakabayashi 200). Consequently, an ethnic/class structure was formed, which was nicely captured by the metaphor “Betel Nuts and Slippers vs. Suits and Leather Shoes”—with Waishengren occupying the majority of upper- and middle-class positions characterized by the wearing of suits and leather shoes, while most Benshengren occupying working-class positions characterized by eating betel
nuts and wearing slippers (Wu 1, 19).

This ethnic/class structure supports a colonial system of self/other divide in which Waishengren’s cultural experiences, through a rhetoric of Chineseness, are legitimized while Benshengren’s cultural experiences are ridiculed and denigrated. The consolidation of Taiwanese consciousness movements, supported by Chen Shui-bian’s presidency under the Democratic Progressive Party’s rule from 2000-2008, provided the condition for a confirmation and celebration of Bengshengren’s cultural experiences, creating what Teri Silvio calls the “Tai structure of sensibility”—a celebration of the previously degraded cultural experiences in the name of Tai(wan) in the realm of popular culture (341). However, the valorization of “Taiwaneseness” celebrated by Silvio is in fact a commodification of cultural difference which does not do justice to ethnic/class minorities.

The notion of common sense image allows us to analyze how historically-constituted clichéd images become realities to be (re)mediated. Kara Keeling proposes to see common sense images as our bodily propensity to (selectively) perceive habituated images which are the products of “sediments of past images”—collective images, experiences, traditions, and knowledges. Through the “cinematic process” which selects the visibility and perceptibility of common sense images, social realities are “perfected”—ordered, produced, and reproduced. In order to be perceptible, an image must be recognizable to some degree according to “common” conceptions of the world. Loser-Dog Queen and mass culture in general rely on the existing common sense (of its target audience), which contains past images which are readily retrievable according to the needs of the present.

The celebration of a Tai structure of sensibility in the domain of popular culture enables the insertion of a uniquely “Taiwanese” family in Loser-Dog Queen in place of the normative upper-middle-class loving and supportive family that Satoko has in
Around Forty. Though both Satoko and Wu-shuan come from single parent families, Satoko’s family is normalized in the sense that her father (a doctor) is already in a long-term relationship with a nurse who functions as the loving and caring mother for Satoko, while Wu-shuan’s mother is still searching for a second husband. This forms the subplot within the show. In Loser-Dog Queen, in addition to constantly pushing her daughter to get married, the mother (played by Lin Mei-xiu) herself also faces the decision to marry either the temple guard (miao gong, ethnically marked as Benshengren) or Wu-shuan’s boss (ethnically marked as Waishengren) and eventually chooses Wu-shuan’s boss.

As “sweet-grass figures” (gancao renwu, or comic sidekick), these three characters are meant for laughter which relies on ethnic- and class-based common sense images of humor. The mother character is a Tai character in the sense that she is ethnically marked as Benshengren through her job—she sells sweet potatoes (sweet potato refers to Bengshenren while taro refers to Waishengren in local vernacular). The marking of ethnicity is further signaled through the historically-constituted common sense image of Benshengren—she is portrayed as vulgar, fat, naïve/stupid, and loud. Lin’s bodily vulgarity constitutes the humor of the show—her unregulated fat body, her hemorrhoids and bleeding body, and her exaggerated bodily gestures (of walking and talking) invite audiences to laugh at her. Moreover, her Taiwanese-inflected Mandarin, dramatized through her stupidity in many acts, reinforces a common sense image of Benshengren, uncultured and unsophisticated.

The two male comic sidekicks that the mother is involved with are coded differently in terms of ethnicity/class. While the temple guard, a lower-class position which is associated with tradition and superstition, is a flat character who appears to be laughed at through his Taiwanese-inflected Mandarin and his stupid and arrogant bodily gestures, Wu-shuan’s boss, owner of a magazine company with a perfect
Mandarin accent, however, transforms from a stingy capitalist to a serious, caring, and responsible father/boss figure at the end and eventually marries Wu-shuan’s mother. Critics argue that the comedy genre naturalizes racial (and in this case, ethnic) hierarchy or legitimizes dominant views of racial order because of its disconnection from the serious; as such, it protects and defends incipient racism (Park et al 158). Similarly, laughter produces boundaries. Those who laugh form a normative community through the act of laughing while the object to be laughed at is simultaneously marked and constructed as the other. As a comic figure, Benshengren stays within the frame of common sense image which is used to humiliate and degrade him through laughter and thus legitimizes the assimilated audiences as the norm while constructing the ethnic/class other; Waishengren, however, is given a storyline which offers him the space of redemption from comic jokes to the normative.

The logic of capital favors the normative which, in particular, is coded through language. If the logic of capital allows for the incorporation of the historically degraded “Tai” characters in idol dramas, a genre that privileges Mandarin as the norm, the visibility of Benshengren (“Tai”) as cultural difference is constructed through a common sense image of ethnicity/class which reinforces the existing ethnic/class hierarchy in Taiwan. Moreover, the intersection of capital and ethnicity/class is gendered. As Hsiao-hung Chang emphasizes, it is, in particular, the ethnicized and classed women who now bear the burden of the historical trauma of speaking Taiwanese Mandarin “as if it is ‘some disease to be cured’” (119). In *Loser-Dog Queen*, Lin Mei-xiu’s Taiwanese Mandarin, unfortunately, re-inscribes her difference as inferior and stupid. In one episode when Lin Mei-xiu shows up at Wu-shuan’s office to push her to get married, her colleagues commented in a demeaning manner: “How can she be Wu-shuan’s mother? She is completely different
from her!” The encoding of difference allows Wu-shuan to assume the image of a Loser Dog—an assimilated, “de-ethnicized”, glamorous subject of choice and fashion. Her de-ethnicization is made possible through assimilation into the dominant culture by language. However, the existence of her mother speaks to the historicity that structures differences among women. It reminds us that Loser Dog’s visibility is made through a process of differentiation, forcing the ethnic/class other to embody the historical trauma while presenting herself as the norm and the normative.

**Conclusion**

The logic of capital underlies the formation of the genre of idol drama, which is historically over-determined within the context of unequal cultural flows between Japan and Taiwan, a structure also supported by the United States after the second World War. This intersection of global capital, regional colonialism and American hegemony in East Asia enables Taiwanese idol dramas to remediate Japanese dramas. In *Loser-Dog Queen*, three (trans)local mechanisms come to mediate the process of remediation: the logic of capital, (trans)local postfeminism, and national ethnicity/class politics. The articulation of idol drama (logic of capital) and postfeminism prioritizes the remediation of gender politics, in particular, those top girls who have the money and power to consume. As capitalism opens up a space for women to possess a sense of autonomy and develop their individuality, romantic stories which feature women’s desire for the male phallus circumscribe women's agency in terms of their choice of lovers and fashion, thereby re-inscribing the norm of hetero-patriarchy and making women subordinate to women.

This approach to the gender politics in *Loser-Dog Queen* echoes many white feminists’ critiques of popular culture and postfeminism in the West. Postfeminism, according to Joke Hermes, signals feminism's “tragic success” in the sense that the ostentatious emphasis on personal choice and women’s autonomy are sacrificed in
favor of reinstating the traditional patriarchal norm (80-81). Angela McRobbie uses the term, “the new sexual contract,” to explain this top girl phenomenon—that the state and capitalism work together to give empowerment to the top girls in the workplace and consumption while re-inscribing masculine hegemony through disciplining women to govern themselves as self-regulated feminine subjects of production and consumption in a neoliberal society. With the beauty and fashion industries substituting (and in Taiwan's case, working with) patriarchy to discipline women to become feminine subjects, postfeminism, instead of challenging masculine hegemony, “undoes” feminism as a social movement in that it incorporates feminist ideals while simultaneously repudiates feminism (54-93).

McRobbie’s analysis provides an insightful critique on top girls in popular culture, but she (though to a lesser extent) and many feminists approach postfeminism with an exclusive focus on gender politics only and claim it to be a form of “apoliticism” (Butler and Desai 2-5). However, Nancy Armstrong cautions us that the act of claiming women’s texts as apolitical is itself a political act—that women’s novels’ exclusive focus on gender politics (in particular, on love and romance) is in fact an engagement in middle-class women’s struggle for cultural dominance. White feminist’ critique on the apoliticism of postfeminism in fact masks the cultural struggles that these postfeminist representations are waging in the global arena in terms of class and racial/ethnic politics and American empire formation. Armstrong calls for an analysis that examines the intersection of gender and class by conceptualizing gender representations as a tool for class struggle in the symbolic domain. For her, cultural representations are a site of struggle among various political factions and that “the material composition of a particular text would have more to do with the forms of representation it overcame” (23). In other words, we need to be aware of the kind of representations or non-representations that Loser Dog Queen as a
A feminine ideal tries to overcome and the implications of this cultural struggle for other forms of social domination.

The remediation of *Loser-Dog Queen* from Japanese dramas tells us that only the love stories of the women from the professional-managerial class can be remediated in inter-Asia cultural texts, and this remediation eliminates the lived experiences of the majority of women—the female temporary workers, lower-class service workers and the factory workers—under globalized patriarchal capitalism. Moreover, if we pay attention to the minor subplot, we discover that this Loser-Dog Queen is also waging a war against the ethnic/class other. By mediating the common sense image of Bengshengren through Lin Mei-xiu’s vulgar bodily performances and her Taiwanese Mandarin, the Loser-Dog Queen as a feminine ideal re-inscribes ethnic/class hierarchy which legitimizes a Chinese-centered national imagination through constructing Benshengren as the other.

Stuart Hall points out that global capital does not obliterate but "rule through other local capitals, rule alongside and in partnership with other economic and political elites" in its process of dissemination (28). As *Loser-Dog Queen* shows, if globalization enables a “de-Westernized” Asian cultural production, the de-Westernized cultural production does not eliminate the West’s influences, but through the logic of capital which carries the imprints of the West, it works with the Japanese colonial legacy, American postfeminism, local patriarchy, and national ethnic/class politics in ways that reinforce the existing power hierarchy. This analysis highlights the power mechanisms that come to structure the making of cultural differences and concludes that, with Koichi Iwabuchi, that driven by capital, inter-Asian media texts do not do justice to cultural difference either within the nation or in the inter-Asia cultural public sphere.
Notes

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2 The official English title of the show is "Defeated Queen." The title, however, does not convey the local use of "loser dog" as a single woman. The use of “Loser-Dog Queen” emphasizes its local meaning.

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