11. Counter-Occupying Americanism in South Korea and Taiwan: Taking Back the Spaces of US Base Culture in the Cold War Musical Number

Evelyn Shih

Abstract
In the 1960s, an American form of live entertainment emerged on the local music scene in East Asia, due to both the cultural power of America and the actual presence of Americans on US military bases. Entertaining Americans became a significant industry in countries like Taiwan and South Korea, and the US presence expanded into spaces of entertainment such as bars, hotels, and dance clubs. This paper analyzes musical numbers in films from that era, discussing their representation of the entertainment space and their fashioning of cinematic attraction as a mode of vernacularizing popular music. These films not only bring the experience of American base-adjacent entertainment into mass consciousness, but also stage their own counter-occupation of these spaces with charismatic performance.

Keywords: taiyupian; Korean film; vernacularization; pop song; performance circuit; attraction

In late 1966, the nightclub scene in Taipei suffered a great shock: the arrival of a Korean song-and-dance troupe whose performance at the First Hotel's dinner show theater completely outdid all the top-line local performers. The club owners and bookers were humiliated to such an extent that they did not dare send a reciprocal troupe to perform in South Korea at the guests' home stage, the Walker Hill Resort in Seoul, capital of South Korea. Both First Hotel and Walker Hill were frequented by American military
personnel, and the discrepancy in quality was nothing short of a national humiliation. To quote a *United Daily News* reporter, Taiwanese club owners felt that they should aspire to a “global standard” to “whet the appetites of international investors,” thereby attracting “international individuals” to appreciate “Chinese performances.” In this, they were completely outdone by their Korean counterparts.

The unspoken standard and ideal consumer, of course, came from the network of American military bases and American military base culture that had sprung up in the years of the Cold War. Americans had been a presence in Korea since the establishment of the US Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) after WWII, with bases to the present day, and the US military base show became a privileged form of stage show amongst local performers beginning in the 1950s. Walker Hill Resort itself had been established in 1963 as a tribute by the Park Chung Hee regime to the US military commitment; it was the namesake of General Walton Walker, who had perished during the Korean War. In Taiwan, the US Taiwan Defense Force was active from 1955 to 1979, with a spike of military visitors passing through Taiwan for “Rest and Recreation” in the 1960s due to the escalation of the Vietnam War. Both Taiwan and South Korea were stops for musical acts traveling the US military base circuit, an itinerary that also included Guam, Okinawa, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Japanese mainland. Regionally famous acts such as Taiwan’s Yuan Sisters went on several tours of Japan and Southeast Asia, riding on their mastery of the American pop style. Some exceptional acts even made a splash in America, such as the renowned Kim Sisters, who came out of the 1950s Korean US military base circuit.

The 1966 South Korean film *Let’s Meet at Walker Hill* (*Wŏk’ŏhiresŏ man-napshida*) demonstrates how one might rise within the local networks to

---

become a star of “international” quality: the protagonist Nam Mira (played by Nam Chŏng-im) is a talented young songstress who performs in all sorts of venues in Seoul, moving up the ladder from clubs populated by a Korean audience to more exclusive establishments with English-language menus, until at last she performs in the titular Walker Hill Resort’s Pacific Nightclub theater. From there, her music producer assures her, she will be headed out for a tour of Southeast Asia and international stardom. Walker Hill was the unquestioned pinnacle of the US military show within Korea, but the next step would be to represent Korean pop music abroad—perhaps even, we might imagine, in Taiwan.

*Let’s Meet at Walker Hill* was not the first film with musical numbers by director Han Hyŏng-mo; in fact, beginning in the mid-1950s, Han became an innovator in entertainment cinema by showcasing musical numbers in many of his films. This was quite a feat in an era when film sound practices were still fairly rudimentary in South Korea following the Korean War, and such films as *Madame Freedom* (1956), *Hyperbolae of Youth* (1956), and *I Am Alone* (1958) demonstrate Han’s idiosyncratic interest in—and strong dedication to—the embedding of musical spectacle within various genres. However, as one of Han’s last works as a director, *Let’s Meet at Walker Hill* distinguishes itself as the only project in his oeuvre to offer such a complete portrait of the media networks within which Americanist styles of music—called *sŭt’aendŏdŭ p’ap* (standard pop)—circulated. Besides Nam Mira’s performances, the film featured strings of performances by the top stars of the US military base circuit, such as Wicky Lee, Lee Kŭm-hee, the Key Boys, and the Arirang Sisters, at venues such as nightclubs, KBS radio and TV stations, the Seoul Citizen’s Hall, and Walker Hill. As a culmination of Han’s interest in popular music, the film is a triumphalist narrative of aspiration and success: today Seoul, tomorrow the Free World.


8 Jo, Jun-hyoung. 2008. “Han Hyŏng-mo: Hanguk taejung yŏnghwa ŭi kaechŏkja [Han Hyŏng-mo: Korea’s Innovator in Mass Movie-making],” *Yŏnghwa Ch’ŏnguk*, August 26, 2008. Han was an elder statesman of the Korean film scene by the mid-1960s, having begun his career as a Japanese-trained cinematographer in the 1940s. He is primarily known for his prolific output in the 1950s, and in particular 1956’s *Madam Freedom*. As Jo’s article shows, *Walker Hill* is not generally seen as a work of great “artistic achievement.” As a culmination of Han’s interest in musicals, however, I would argue it is a crown jewel.
By contrast, Taiwanese cinema offers a much darker vision of the venues geared towards American military clientele. The film *May 13, Night of Sorrow* (1965) opens after the credits with its protagonist, Siok-hūi (played by Chang Ching Ching), performing a cover of Paul Anka’s “Crazy Love” as she descends the stairs of a dinner show stage. The camera, following her in her descent, reveals a self-orientalizing stage set piece, complete with an ornate tile-roof pavilion hiding the modern jazz band. She attracts the unwanted attention of a lustful local businessman, who immediately demands her services as an escort. The establishment is later revealed to be a fictional bar called “Bagio,” a place where Siok-hūi goes by the anglicized name “Lena.” When she escapes Bagio in the company of her love interest Bûn-pin, they walk out of the bar and onto a street lit up with other signs in English: “SOUVENIRS,” “GIFT EMPORIUM,” and the neon lights of the infamous American clubs “Suzie Wong” and “OK Bar.”

For Siok-hūi, performing in the bar is a dead end, earning her only societal disdain and physical endangerment. Her facility at singing the American ballad does not bring her mobility or a chance at stardom. This was in contrast to the rising popularity of “hit music” (*remen yinyue*) bands, which were flourishing in the nightclub scene of the mid-1960s. The influx of American soldiers taking Rest and Recreation days from the Vietnam War frontlines had brought about a bumper crop of new American-style bars and clubs, which in turn fed the Americanist music scene. The depiction of Siok-hūi is, perhaps, cleaving to melodramatic archetypes of the misunderstood and victimized songstress in Taiyu cinema; but in showing her as a victim of exploitative labor practices in an Americanist space, it also gives us a glimpse of popular anti-Americanism in this period.

Korean cinema did not lack in negative portrayals of American base culture, beginning with the *yangkongju* (Western princess) films of the 1950s, such as *Flowers in Hell* (1958, dir. Shin Sangok). However, in the musical world of *Let’s Meet at Walker Hill*, the implication of sexual and labor exploitation is eschewed in favor of what I argue is an idealist move, an attempt to find

---


utopia through entertainment forms, as Richard Dyer suggested. 12 That is, the film stages musical numbers that act against the occupying force of America and American culture by counter-occupying the performance spaces and musical styles catering to Americans. If Americans occupied urban spaces of performance in Taipei and Seoul, the musical cinema offers a filmic speculation: what if the Americans were to vanish, and these spaces, this music, was wholly ours?

This paper will discuss the musical genre as it was manifested in 1960s Taiwan and South Korea, arguing that it was uniquely placed to execute counter-occupation through entertainment spectacle. Looking more closely at the two-sided coin of Americanism and anti-Americanism in the popular culture in this period, I find filmic evidence for the idea that social class often determined one’s relationship to entertainment spaces within the US military base network. Subsequently, I offer examples of musical counter-occupation occurring in both Taiwanese and South Korean films, demonstrating narrative, visual, and extra-filmic modes of this performative act. Finally, I return to the idea that the ultimate stage of counter-occupation would be the banishment of the American spectator and the Americanized entertainment space from cinema altogether. We hear, instead, new, hybrid forms of music that erase the visual signs of Americanism and organically fuse its dynamic musical signatures with local idioms.

The Musical Cinema

Was the musical a strong film genre in Taiwanese and South Korean cinemas of the 1960s? The answer to this question depends, of course, on one’s definition of “the musical.” Studies of the musical based on the “classical” Hollywood musicals from the 1930s to the 1960s, focalized on the lavish MGM studio production, emphasize qualities such as dual-focus, integration, or even Camp. 13 In the context of more low-budget productions and different audience expectations, Taiwanese and South Korean musical cinema seems to flout most of these rules, in most cases delivering neither a strict

dual-focus nor a strong diegetic foundation for the musical number. They were more integrated, as it were, with the aesthetic of the variety show and other vernacular forms of live performance. Regionally, high production budget films from Hong Kong coming out of Cathay MP & GI and Shaw Brothers studios such as *Wild, Wild Rose* (1960) and *Love Parade* (1961) also tended to present musicals in this mode, bolstering the attraction of their numbers with more lavish set pieces.

In Korea, early post-Korean War films often featured talent from *ak-kŭk* (literally “music drama”) troupes, including directors, scriptwriters, and performers who could pull off both comedy and musical performance. As that kind of variety show live performance style faded in the 1960s, the “syodan” (a transliteration of the English word “show” and the Korean word *dan* for “troupe”) produced more film and TV stars. In Taiwan, popular performance institutions that fed into musical film performance included *koa-á-hí* opera and stage actors from *sin-kiók* (the “new style theater”), both of which rose in eminence during the Japanese colonial period. Such live performance stars were particularly prominent in the *taiyupian*, or films in Taiwanese Hokkien. It was also common for musical and comedic talent from a film to be invited to perform on stage at screenings, a practice called “taking the stage along with the film” (*suipiandengtai*).

In both Korean and Taiwanese popular cinemas, musical numbers often appeared in films that were not predominantly musical; and when films did have five or more musical numbers, they often did not conform to expectations of musical performances by a male and female lead on screen. In *May 13, Night of Sorrow*, for example, Siok-hūi is only shown twice singing in the nightclub. Four other numbers are delivered as non-diegetic music, in which Siok-hūi’s singing voice (provided by Cheng Hsiu-mei) serves as a kind of voiceover. Instead of the numbers structuring the narrative, as in the American or MGM musical, they were often placed within the narrative incidentally, as one attraction among many. In short, films with musical numbers in these cinemas engaged loosely with the musical genre.

Even so, *Let’s Meet at Walker Hill* is an unusual film of the period in that it includes an unusually large count of musical numbers—to such an extent that the numbers often have nothing to do with named characters.

---


15 Chih-heng Su, *Wu ganyuan de dianying shì: cengjìng, Taiwan you ge Haolaiwú* (Taipei Shi: Chun shan chu ban, 2020).
who are active in the narrative.\textsuperscript{16} Performances by stars like Wicky Lee and Lee Kŭm-hee simply come before or after Nam Mira’s performance, and the singers do not interact with any named characters. At the same time, the musical numbers take up a lot of play time within the length of the film. This indicates that one of the film’s main goals is to showcase top talent in Korea, including singers and dancers, who have perfected an American accent and style. In contrast to \textit{taiyupian}, which often feature American-style songs sung in Chinese (as in \textit{Chang Ti Seeks Ah-Chu}, discussed later) or adapted into a minor pentatonic mode reminiscent of \textit{enka} (as in \textit{May 13}), \textit{Let’s Meet at Walker Hill} reveals an orientation of the Korean standard pop music scene towards a virtuosic mimesis of American music.

There are structural reasons for this difference: Korean entertainers who aspired to perform on the US military base circuit, both within and outside of Korean borders, auditioned for a centralized booking office, where they were given a ranked rating that would determine their pay level.\textsuperscript{17} This heightened the level of standardization found in Korean “standard pop.” Taiwanese “hit music” musicians, by contrast, were hired by individual club owners, and the standardization was much less pronounced. This was especially true after 1966, when the government began to tax foreign performers, and the clubs had to turn to local talent.\textsuperscript{18} The mid-to-late 1960s became a new era of florescence for the small group of musicians that formed the nascent pop-rock scene.\textsuperscript{19} Many were self-taught and learned the new style by listening to AFTN radio.

In short, Americanist musicians in Taiwan did not come out of a centralized system of selection; it was more a game of “telephone.” Further complicating the matter was the fact that they often played a repertoire of Mandopop alongside their American fare of “Western songs” (\textit{xiyangge}); this difference in style became one of their strengths when they hit local markets in Japan, where it played as a kind of \textit{chinoiserie}. Little wonder, then, that the club owners in Taipei were shocked at the skill and American-style professionalization of Korean performers from Walker Hill in 1966 and felt

\textsuperscript{16} In terms of its interest in showing the audience brightly colored, staged musical numbers, \textit{Walker Hill} is more similar to \textit{Love Parade} (1961) from Hong Kong than other South Korean films. A great deal of care is taken in the cinematography to make stage effects such as lighting and moving set pieces into exciting cinematic attractions. And like \textit{Love Parade}, \textit{Walker Hill}’s numbers take place on stage within the filmic diegesis.

\textsuperscript{17} See Maliangkay, “Koreans Got Talent: Auditioning for U.S. Army Gigs in Korea,” 69–71.


\textsuperscript{19} Xiong, “Remen, Yaogun Dao Min’ge--Taiwan Qingniande Yinyue Shijie (1950–1970).”
too ashamed to send Taiwanese performers in exchange. If Americanism included an ever closer approximation to the American original, then Korean performers certainly had a leg up.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the majority of Korean and Taiwanese pop culture consumers during this time, especially those residing outside of Seoul and Taipei, did not have easy access to the live performance of American-style music. At the same time, provincial populations outside of the capitals formed the primary audience for taiyupian and Korean genre comedies such as *Let's Meet at Walker Hill*. In Korea, provincial audiences constituted a great source of revenue, and their consumption of the “B movie” often supported more prestigious theatrical releases. In Taiwan, the prestige cinema released in Mandarin was mainly funded through the state-controlled Central Motion Picture Company in the 1950s and 1960s, with more privatized companies competing in this arena thereafter. Mandarin films produced by large Hong Kong studios were also increasingly popular during this time. However, the majority of the provincial audience still actively consumed the taiyupian, which as a whole were viewed as occupying a low culture position.

The musicals that counter-occupy American spaces, I would argue, do this in two senses: first, by transforming the exclusive bars and clubs into cinematic experiences that could be consumed outside of the capitals; and second, by presenting the Americanist musical style—and even the US military base circuit itself—as something that rightfully belongs to the local audience, especially those who were non-urban, non-English speaking, and usually excluded from the cosmopolitan pleasure of Americanist culture. This counter-occupation proceeded apace with the vernacularization of the music itself, and along with broadcast TV and radio, promoted a localist music for localist demands by side-stepping the audience of Americans. Musical numbers in these films also produced an indirect censure of Americanist music scenes as sites of labor exploitation through the lens of vernacularized music experiences.

**Americanism/Anti-Americanism**

In the 1960s, there was a duality inherent to informal spaces of American occupation, that is, the American-style bar and dinner show space in


South Korea and Taiwan. The entertainment establishment that caters to Americans is at once a space of thrilling escape—or hedonistic youth culture—and a space of labor exploitation, sexual and otherwise. It was under these terms, and in these spaces, that the vernacularization of musical styles associated with American consumption progressed over the course of a decade.

In Korea, the more pronounced standardization that emerged from the practice of centralized booking suggests a stronger cultural hegemony. Subsequently, the performance circuit and the resulting musical scene took on the appearance of a meritocracy. The birth of a star like Nam Mira means an incremental rise through the system, based on her musical talent and not her sexual availability to powerful men. At the same time, her father (played by Sŏ Yongch’un) and lover Samnyŏng (played by Twist Kim) are marked as the outcasts of this system: country bumpkins who do not understand Seoul’s urban culture, not to mention the English language or club culture, and who are excluded from formal theater performances because they cannot afford to pay. In other words, the Americanist occupation of culture and public space accentuates a class division.

In one early scene, the two rubes enter a bar where young people are shown dancing to a rousing rendition of “Woolly Bully” (1965, Sam the Sham and the Pharoahs) still gripping their dried fish and fresh-pressed sesame oil from the countryside. When the waitress offers them orange juice, using the transliteration “orenji jyusŭ,” they misapprehend the first part of the word (“ore”) to mean “takes a long time,” and ask for something that can be served quickly instead. When the juice does arrive, they attempt to use the straws from their two glasses as one set of chopsticks to eat the ice cubes, arousing peals of laughter from the waitresses. Their sesame oil spills when the Queen Bee band takes the stage to sing a rendition of “Come See About Me” (1964, The Supremes), causing all the young dancers to slip and fall on the dance floor in a new take on the banana peel gag. In short, the genre of their narrative is established as a kind of sanggyŏnggi—the encounter of the backwards, rural, fish-out-of-water comedian with the sophisticated cultural nuances of urban life. At the same time, the film sandwiches the comic relief between two musical numbers and shows the “correct” response to Americanist music in the gyrating dance moves of the well-dressed young men and women. Provincial audiences watching the film are invited to the table and taught how one should act within these spaces at the same time that they are entertained.

What is happening here is not strictly a top-down pedagogical moment in which the provincial figures are humiliated. Instead, the film depicts a
space of vernacularization in which the urban folk are also used for comic spectacle. Yet audiences who identify with the two rural characters are invited to affirm a kind of social aspiration through the assertion of superiority: I may have been like these two fools once, but now I know better. Part of the superior social status to which the film suggests its audience should aspire is, of course, the Americanist style of music.

By contrast, a later scene in the film provides a clearer indication of anti-Americanism. Entering a bar right after Nam Mira performs, the father and Samnyŏng are asked to order from a menu in English and are comically incapable of reading from it. The biggest challenge, however, is not linguistic occupation but sexual occupation: the announcer proclaims that the next act is a “pink” (erotic) dance in the style of “American flappers.” The film does not show the erotic dance; all that is shown is the disapproval of the father, who demands that the (Korean) girls put on more clothing. Sŏ Yŏngch’ŭn explodes with the indignation of his wounded patriarchal and nationalist sensibilities, instigating a food fight that ultimately ends with his removal from the premises.

In this second sequence, it is made clear that this space serves the American consumer more than the provincial figures, who voice their protest against the sight of their countrywomen exposed for American pleasure. The space has been occupied: Koreans are not welcome unless they play by the preset rules. Certainly, this is a rhetorical position that prioritizes the male gaze and the right of the patriarch to act as guardian of all Korean women. The trope of using female sex work as a stand-in for national victimization was common in leftist literature of this era, according to Jin-kyung Lee. I would argue that here, in a brief moment that sits on the edge between comedy and critique, Let’s Meet at Walker Hill engages in this same rhetoric, and what is at stake is the exploitation of female labor that is present within the entertainment spaces of the American military circuit.

If anything, Taiwanese cinema is even more explicit in using the metaphor of female sex work and in the articulation of the American-facing club and bar space as a duality of hedonistic pleasure (for the wealthy) and exploitation (for the working class). In The Early Train from Taipei (1964), the female protagonist Siû-lân travels to Taipei from the countryside to work as a dance

---


23 Jin-kyung Lee, Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 130–1.
escort because she and her mother are in debt. Her place of work is the “Night Paris” club, and it is suggested through exterior shots that the club is housed in First Hotel. In one central sequence, Siù-lân drinks too much while with a customer and is taken to a room. The film cuts from a scene where the predator approaches her still form on the bed to a montage of the dance floor: close-up shots of men and women’s feet dancing “The Twist,” intercut with medium shot-reverse shots of young men and women dancing in pairs, close-ups of musical instruments, a disco ball, full shots of the bustling dance floor, and shots of flowers being pummeled by the pouring rain outside. As if to echo the lightning of the thunderstorm, the club scene flashes again and again with bright light, creating dynamic shadows. At the end of the sequence, the film cuts back to the scene in the hotel room, where Siù-lân is weeping and fixing her clothing. The fast pace and dynamism of the montage, in other words, take the place of Siù-lân’s rape in filmic representation. The two sides of the American-style club space, as brought together through editing, are the hedonistic pleasure of youth and Americanist dance forms on the one hand and sexual exploitation on the other.

The dangers of the Americanist entertainment space were certainly gendered. But it was not just young women who were exploited for their labor in these spaces; provincial men of lower classes were also denied entry by the simple fact of their social status. Chang Ti Seeks Ah-Chu (1968, dir. Wu Fei-ch’ien), for example, directly addresses the status of working-class males when it comes to American-style bars and clubs. The eponymous Chang Ti was, at the time, a well-known performer on the nightclub scene as a Mandarin song singer and comic performer. In his film role, however, Chang Ti is transformed into a provincial young man who has come to Taipei in search of his love interest, Ah-Chu (played by koa-á-hì star Yang Lihua), and he finds employment as a lowly server at the Hong Kong Restaurant. Chang Ti and his friend Songyi are shown walking in the front door of the establishment in answer of a “Help Wanted” ad before the camera tilts up to the nightclub’s English-language neon sign. Soon after, Chang Ti is shown watching a performance by the “Hong Ling Sisters Three,” who in real life often accompanied Chang Di in his stage shows on the Americanist circuit. The Sisters are performing a Mandarin version of “Historia de un Amor,” a song that rose to fame as the theme song for a 1956 Mexican film of the same name and was made popular in Mandarin by the Hong Kong

24 The “Flowers on a Rainy Night” is a common metaphor in Taiwanese popular culture for a female sex worker, dating from a popular song of the same name from the Japanese colonial era, “U-iā-hoe.”
songstress Tsin Ting in 1960. While not American in nature, the music is emblematic of what would have been popular in an Americanist space at that time: a Mandopop cover of an international hit.

The film takes care to thematize Chang Ti’s spectatorship in this scene. In effect, there is cross-cutting between a long shot, showing Chang Ti and Songyi as servers; and medium to close-up shots, in which we see Chang Ti and Songyi’s immersion within the musical experience. We begin with a straight frontal shot showing the stage from the back of the nightclub and the two bumbling waiters in the middle of the tables, but soon cut to a shot over the shoulders of the dancing Sisters, which shows the two servers stopping to stare. In a further close-up, we see their faces smiling with unbounded pleasure. A brief long shot reveals that they have stopped serving food; we turn back to their view of the stage, with a medium-length shot panning from the Sisters all the way down the glittering stage to the brass section, the drum set, and the piano. Back in the long shot, Chang Ti realizes the nightclub manager is coming and drops his serving tray in his rush to look busy. Both servers are chased out of the room with a sound scolding. The camera does not follow them but remains in place until the Hong Ling sisters finish their song and bow to a round of applause. Unlike Chang Ti, the film viewer is given the privilege of listening to the end; but she is also permitted to have sympathy for his exclusion.

In all of these films, the American-style performance space, whether it is a bar, a nightclub, or a theater, is depicted as an exclusionary space geared towards the tastes of American servicemen. The exclusionary act, however, is not meted out by Americans; instead, it is the job of Koreans and Taiwanese who have been hired to maintain the decorum of establishments on behalf of Americans and the elite few who have not only learned the rules, thanks to social privilege, but have also bought into the hegemony of American culture. The film viewers are invited to sympathize not with the nameless young dancers but with the provincial, working-class characters who are excluded or exploited in these spaces. They are primed for the arrival of the next narrative movement: the counter-occupation.

**Counter-Occupying Americanist Spaces**

Chang Ti never becomes a star in Taipei, let alone the American military base circuit abroad, in *Chang Ti Seeks A-Chu*. However, he does counter-occupy

---

25 The Mandarin title is “Wo de xinli meyou ta” (“He is not in my heart”). Teresa Teng, a rising star in this era who would go on to international fame, sang an up-tempo cover of this song in 1967.
the space from which he is banished in a key dream sequence. The exhausted Chang Ti is seen sweeping the nightclub after hours, then sitting on the side of the stage and dozing off while leaning on his broom. Almost immediately, a superimposed double of Chang appears, crouched in the same position. He rises up in a dapper, fitted suit with microphone in hand and solidifies in shape, then breaks into song: an early version of “My Lena,” a Mandopop tune, with lyrics by a star of the US military base circuit, Ni Bin.26 The song makes a nod to Americanist origins with both its doo wop style arrangement and a phrase in English anchoring the chorus, “I love you.” Chang Ti inhabits the American pop style with a light swagger, completely shedding his country yokel persona for a polished musical delivery as he takes center stage.

When he hits the first verse, Chang steps back towards the bandstand, and in waltzes his friend Songyi, dressed in a flamboyant sombrero and the layered ruffle sleeves of a Cuban rumba costume. He, in turn, leads in A-Chu, wearing a sleeveless tunic and slacks. The dream sequence seems to suggest the fulfillment of Chang Ti’s desire for the lost A-Chu, as well as his incorporation of trendy references to the craze for mambo, which was introduced to East Asia through the American military entertainment circuit.27 A panning shot of the musicians during a musical break cuts to a close-up of Chang Ti, who bobs from one side of the frame to the other. This number, in contrast to the last, is not about offering the full musical number so much as it is about centering Chang Ti’s enjoyment of this moment in the spotlight. But Chang’s reverie is rudely interrupted by the nightclub manager’s angry voice, and the film cuts back to a long shot of the empty nightclub with the two workers sleeping on the job. They are promptly fired; and with that, Chang Ti is banished from the nightclub scene for the rest of the film.

Despite the fact that it ends in the full exclusion of Chang Ti and Songyi from the Americanist space, I propose that this sequence be read as a counter-occupation. As a follow-up to the previous scene, in which Chang Ti and Songyi are denied the right to consume the entertainment being offered in the Hong Kong Restaurant, this sequence bypasses the question of consumption, moving straight to the space of performance. Chang Ti’s

26 Ni Bin was recruited to go on tour with the ROC representative performance troupe to US military bases right out of performance school. “Gesheng hunhou de Ni Bin,” Economic Daily News (Jingji Ribao), January 4, 1969.

27 Klein discusses the “mambo craze” that hit Korea at this time as “part of a curriculum in cosmopolitan modernity that the US military inadvertently introduced into Korea as it entertained its own troops.” The same might be said of the style’s popularity in Taiwan. Klein, Cold War Cosmopolitanism, 188–90.
dream is not to become a customer but to control the images and musical content displayed on stage. While evoking the charisma and youthful appeal of the Americanist style, the song was locally written, created to realize the fantasies of Chang Ti the country boy. His own pleasure in the music is given the pride of place over the response of audience members, whose faces are never shown. Americanism remains only as a line of English in the chorus, kept for the purposes of signifying Chang Ti’s arrival as a cosmopolitan talent in his fantasy. With this musical number, Chang Ti closes the class-based gap between those excluded and those conditionally welcomed in the Americanist space, and claims that space for his own.

Nam Mira’s climactic performance at the Walker Hill dinner theater is also designed to close a gap: thanks to Mira’s invitation, Samnyŏng and her father enter the Walker Hill resort as guests. The duo finally have a seat at the table and are shown viewing a long string of song and dance performances leading up to Mira’s performance, applauding and taking in the show. Two white men are visible at the table next to theirs, as if to underscore their proximity to American military spectators; but the country bumpkins are neither shamed for their attire nor asked to eat unfamiliar foods. Instead, the film suppresses the comedic element and builds towards a melodramatic climax in this sequence. Sŏ Yongch’un and Twist Kim do not enact the counter-occupation, but they are to be key emotional witnesses.

The counter-occupational event is Nam Mira’s signature song “The Feeling of Missing You” (Pogo sip’un maum), performed visually by the actress Nam Chŏng-Im in a purple evening gown and on the soundtrack by singer Sŏng T’aemi. Significantly, it is a fully Korean-language ballad set against a gentle bolero rhythm. Like Chang Ti’s “My Lena,” the song straddles the line between the formal traits of Americanism (via the mambo craze) and local identity. In this case, the song is also distinguished from Nam’s other number in the film, “Dark Words of Farewell” (Kŏmŭn yibyŏl ŭi kŭlssi), which adopts the classic minor pentatonic modality of “trot” music. If “trot” is the most successful strain of “local color” to come into the US military circuit in Korea, just as Mandopop was the “local color” of choice in Taiwan, “The Feeling of Missing You” leaves it behind in favor of a minor Americanism. Instead of mainstream American pop-rock, it adopts a Latin rhythm along with the open major tonality of a folk song. In contrast with the performers singing in perfect English, Nam Mira sings only in Korean; and if the editing

---

of the film is to be believed, she sings only to Samnyŏng. The camera zooms in to a medium full length, focusing on Nam’s delivery, until it cuts directly to an eyeline match with Sŏ Yongch’un and Twist Kim in the audience, in medium close-up shots that emphasize the intensity of their emotion as they look on. In Mira’s number, which precipitates her reunion with her father, the Americans have all but vanished from sight.

A counter-occupation of mise-en-scene accompanies Mira’s performance, which transforms the Walker Hill stage into a resonance chamber for her declaration of love for Samnyŏng and her underlying desire to see her long-lost father. The stage set behind her is adorned with geometric shapes in a 1960s mod, abstract style; and more curiously, a rocket labeled “ROK” (Republic of Korea) shooting up just off center. This monumental element on the set claims the stage as Korean while claiming Korea’s place within the technological modernity of the 1960s space race. What does the rocket have to do with Mira’s love ballad? In fact, it is the excessive nationalist performativity of the ROK projectile that indicates the ultimate function of the sequence as a counter-occupation. Walker Hill was founded as a space to entertain foreign dignitaries, especially those affiliated with the US military. Mira’s number, by contrast, is dedicated to Korea: an essentialized version of Korea—as represented by her provincial father and Samnyŏng—and the state of South Korea, which was rising in economic and military strength itself in the developmental period of the 1960s. Like Chang Ti’s performance, this was a fantasy, a projection of future national strength, which was further embodied in Nam Mira’s meteoric rise through the Americanist musical network.

Disappearing Americans

Thus far, I have alluded to the representation of Americanist entertainment spaces in Taipei and Seoul and to the performance of Americanist music in Taiwanese and South Korean cinema. In my conclusion to this chapter, however, I would like to suggest that the ultimate disappearance of Americans was instituted in one film titled The Young Girl Goes to Town (1966, dir. Wu Feijian). In this film, the pre-teen Bi-yıng has left her provincial home in search of her missing father. She sees a group of medicine sellers in front of a temple who are performing to get some crowd interest in their wares: a handsome man, a woman, and a second man dressed as a clown. They are failing terribly at getting the crowd on their side, leaning only on the strength of one trumpet, two marching band drums, and the clown’s strange,
gyrating dance. Out of kindness, Bi-ying volunteers to help the struggling performers by singing a tune herself. The handsome man, who happens to be her long lost father, enthusiastically invites her to their makeshift stage.

As the first bars of the girl’s song “Wandering the Jianghu” begin to play, an astounding mismatch occurs: a total divergence between the musical instruments represented visually—a lone trumpet and a marching band drum—and the sound of the music, which appears to be a basic eight bar blues progression played on bass, guitar, and drum kit. The most overt flouting of the sound-image synchronization occurs during the musical break, in which the father dutifully pretends to play a trumpet solo against the twanging of a blues guitar. The Americanist entertainment space has disappeared; does its acousmêtre continue to haunt the screen?

I would argue that this transposition of the blues sound is not just a technical mistake. The sound designer seems perfectly capable, as the previous sequence of the medicine sellers’ performance is accompanied by convincing post-synchronized sound, with the identifiable audio-visual matches for the trumpet and single drum. Instead, I would suggest that the sound editing offers a mode of escaping the Americanist space, of counter-occupying its associated musical style with another, almost completely opposite type of space.

Gone are the bandstand, the stage, and the dining tables of the nightclub. No invitation or entrance fee is required. This is a true temple performance, one that uses the open space in front of a Daoist/Buddhist temple as a public space of gathering, at once sacred and secular. Such a space was traditionally used to stage outdoor opera or puppet theater, for the benefit of the community as much as in honor of the gods and ancestors. The viewers are men and women, children and their parents, suited men and housewives in plain dresses. Instead of American men and rich local businessmen consuming this music as an exclusive right, the music is offered, seemingly, to all of the taiyu audience.

The trappings of Americanist musical style are fully absorbed into the taiyu idiom of “wandering the lakes and river,” which refers to both the world of martial arts and the world of entertainment. The musical number here defies definition as Americanist, enka style, Mandopop, or even taiyu popular song but stands at their intersection in a moment of exuberant vernacularization. In this final disappearance of the Americanist entertainment space, the counter-occupation of American style is complete. As in Let’s Meet at Walker Hill, the music is ultimately the medium that brings separated families together, an intuitive mode of connection and communal solidarity working against exclusion and exploitation.
Bibliography


Su, Chih-heng. 2020. *Wu ganyuan de dianying shi: cengjing, Taiwan you ge Haolaiwu* [Once upon a Time in Holiwood Taiwan]. TaiBei Shi: Chun shan chu ban.


**About the Author**

**Evelyn Shih** is a scholar of Chinese and Korean literature, media, and culture. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Chinese at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her work has received the support of the Fulbright Program, the American Council of Learned Societies, Academia Sinica, and the Korea Foundation. She has published in the *Journal of Chinese Cinemas, Room One Thousand*, and the *Journal of Korean Studies*, and she is working on a book project titled *The Cold War Comic: Power and Laughter in Taiwan and South Korea, 1948–1979.*