

Japanese Hip-Hop and Globalization

Image of Crazy-A
removed for copyright
reasons.

Ian Condry
M.I.T.

Two Lessons of Hip-Hop in Japan

1. cultural influence is best viewed
**not as "global vs. local" but
as "genba globalization"**

- "**genba**" = place where culture is performed
- "cultural flows" viewed in terms of "**performativity**" in particular **locations**

2. The spread of American-style popular culture does not necessarily spread American "soft power" (e.g., rap & 9/11)

Image of MC U of Kick the Can Crew Ikebukuro, 2/97)
removed for copyright reasons.

Gender as Performance

- **Judith Butler:**

- Gender is a "stylized repetition of acts...which are internally discontinuous [so that] the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe to perform in the mode of belief." Quoted in Diamond (1996), p. 4
 - QUESTION: ethnicity, race, other aspects of identity too . . . ?

What is hip-hop?

Four elements

1. rap
 - rhythm and rhyme (not singing)
2. DJ
 - scratch records, mix, breakbeats
3. breakdance
 - battling, spinning, in parks
4. graffiti
 - aerosol art on trains and in public spaces

Image of
Sakuragi-cho
Yokohama,
Japan removed
for copyright
reasons.

Hip-hop's U.S. origins

- **New York City, 1970s**
- largely African American movement
- Block parties in the South Bronx (NY)
- from "just a fad" (according to big media) to "global conquest" (*Vibe* magazine)
- "Black culture" more than "American culture"

Image from
1982 film
"Wild Style"
documents
graffiti,
breakdance,
rap, DJ in
NYC.
removed for
copyright
reasons.
Film is shown
in Tokyo 1983

What does hip-hop in Japan tell us about how culture is changing?

Breakdance image removed for copyright reasons.

Image of Graffiti in Yokohama removed for copyright reasons.

DJ image removed for copyright reasons.

"Global homogenization" of culture?

emphasis on convergence

- "globalization of nothing"
 - George Ritzer
- "networks of universalization"
 - Armand Mattelart
- cultural imperialism (see Tomlinson)
- Americanization / Westernization
- spread of Western style consumerism

Global homogenization?

evidence of convergence

Image from July 2000, free paper cover removed for copyright reasons.

- "four elements": rap, DJ, dance, graffiti
- fashion (platinum chains, baseball caps, Nike)
- Styles popular in the U.S. appear quickly in Japan (Timbaland, reggaeton)

or "localization"?

Image of CD jacket Kohei Japan (2000)
removed for copyright reasons.

"Localization"

emphasis on divergence

- domestication
 - Joseph Tobin
- glocalization
 - Roland Robertson
- local identity
 - Tony Mitchell
- localization
 - James Watson
- consumers transform
 - Daniel Miller

Image of CD jacket The Best of Japanese HIP HOP removed for copyright reasons.

Language

Image of Sakuragi-cho,
Yokohama removed for
copyright reasons.

侍

"samurai"

Yo, check it!

Yo チェキッ!

要チェキッ!



yô = "necessary"

Hime (2003) "*If the peony stands*"

Album cover image from
www.DJHonda.co.jp removed for
copyright reasons.

- Verse: Rap (rhythm and rhyme)
- Chorus: *tanka* (31 syllable poem, 8th century)
- *giri* (social obligations) / *ninjô* (human feelings)

Hime 姫

(2003)

立てば芍薬

(If the peony stands)

tanka poem for chorus

(31 syllables)

この音と	<i>kono oto to</i> (5)	this sound
義理と人情	<i>giri to ninjou</i> (7)	<i>giri</i> and <i>ninjô</i>
和の心	<i>wa no kokoro</i> (5)	the soul of Japan
奇襲するかな	<i>kishuu suru ka na</i> (7)	will the surprise attack
芍薬の花	<i>shakuyaku no hana</i> (7)	come from the peony?

Hime (2003) *If the peony stands*

Genba

Globalization

現場

gen ba

“actual site”

Hip Hop image
removed for
copyright
reasons.

Kaminari Kazoku (1995)

Umedy (1997)

Hip Hop image
removed for
copyright
reasons.

Image of Pyramid Structure of Music Scene
removed for copyright reasons.

What is "real" Japanese hip-hop?

Dabo, Hitman image removed for copyright reasons.

Uzi image removed for copyright reasons.

(2002)

Recently, the hip-hop scene in Japan is BOTH

- "more global" in style (e.g., more gangstas, thugs) AND
- "more local" (more samurai, regional slang, kabuki vocals)

(2002)

Lesson 1: not global vs. local but "*genba* globalization"

- "*genba*" = places where hip-hop is performed (nightclubs and recording studios)
- the mix of global and local is determined by *genba*, that is, where and how it is performed
- so, we can view "cultural influence" in terms of performances in particular *genba* and extent to which messages reach wider audiences
- **Key question: What aesthetic and political subjectivities enlivened through hip-hop?**

Utamaru:

- Hip-hop is a culture of the "first person singular."
- Whether music or graffiti, everyone's yelling "I'm this!"
- "Black culture" not "American culture" so element of opposition in some Japanese hip-hop

Image of Rhymester (2001)
Uwasa no Shinsô removed for
copyright reasons.

Rhymester
"9/11 Everyday"

from the album
"Grey Zone" (2003)

ライムスター
「911エブリデイ」

Joseph Nye (2004) "Soft Power"

"**Soft power**" refers to a nation's ability to influence other nations through sympathetic responses rather than coercion or payments.

Soft power "arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies" (Nye 2004).

But "American" popular culture does not necessarily spread "national interests"

Nor does Japanese hip-hop

King Giddra

Image of *Sora kara no chikara*
(1995) removed for copyright
reasons.

("The Power from the Sky")

from L to R:

K Dub Shine

DJ Oasis

Zebra

K Dub Shine

Image “it’s always civilians who are sacrificed, even so, Bush sleeps in his bed tonight” removed for copyright reasons.

Lesson 2: "soft power" depends not on national styles but performances in *genba*

- hip-hop globalization entails complex cultural influence (race, language, gender, markets, etc.)
- hip-hop enlivens certain aesthetic and political subjectivities through performances that mix "global" and "local"
- Japanese hip-hop can teach Americans about the potentials for hip-hop to question global politics

New Voices

Image of Fans at "B-Boy Park 2001," Yoyogi Park,
Tokyo removed for copyright reasons.

Graffiti images removed for
copyright reasons

For more info:

[http:// iancondry.com](http://iancondry.com)

終

the end

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21G.067J / WGS.608J Cultural Performances of Asia
Fall 2005

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.