License to Play?

New Zealand youth articulates its cultural identity through play with East Asian popular culture.

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The ways people use cultural commodities

• “There is no ‘authentic’ folk culture to provide an alternative, and so popular culture is necessarily the art of making do with what is available. This means that the study of popular culture requires the study not only of the cultural commodities out of which it is made, but also of the ways that people use them. The latter are far more creative and varied than the former.” (John Fiske (1989) *Understanding Popular Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, p.)
Questions to consider

• The question is how global, or in this context North East Asian popular culture, contributes towards local articulations of New Zealand cultural identity?
• Why do some New Zealand youth choose to consume East Asian popular culture at all?
• What does this consumption really mean?
• Is the discourse of East Asian popular culture is still relevant in this context?
Links between East Asian Popular Culture and participant’s own cultural identity
“As a child, growing up in Northland, we never had mentors or advisors around to inspire us. Therefore, watching Chinese Martial Arts movies inspired my entire neighbourhood in Tikipunga, Whangarei, to take up Kung-Fu in our backyards in an attempt to emulate what we saw on-screen. During this period, the absence of father figures led Kiwi children of different ethnic backgrounds to look up to or admire Kung Fu actors, so in turn, they adopted martial artists as symbols of inspiration and security.
“Warrior culture” of MA movies and Maori culture

Maori culture has a rich history of ancestral warriors yet modern families never had ‘warriors’ around to protect them and their homes. Hence the attraction of a one man army protecting his people and culture was found in the majority of Chinese martial art films. Martial art movies were seen as a form of escapism from real life and, in extreme cases, the characters seemed mythical and mysterious.”
A New Role Model – hybridised identity

“[Martial Arts films] had an impact on my friends and family, growing up in an environment where domestic violence was common. Bruce Lee films inspired us to learn self-defence and teach our friends how to defend themselves from their violent parents. This engagement with my peers made us closer, increasing the soft-power of Chinese Martial Arts films in our minds.”
A hybridised identity through ‘play’ with MA movies

“We all saw ourselves as being set apart from others, for a few reasons. Mainly we were Maori and similar wave lengths at the time i.e. into our sports, social life we did together. We were kind of new to the Hamilton touch scene, we knew about the top two teams ‘X men’ and ‘Tamatoa’; who also tried to recruit us. But we thought we could make the competition more interesting by putting in our team; and since we all like watching DBZ the ‘Saiyans’ were hatched.”
Why DBZ? ‘Asians – freaky chaps’

“All ‘Da Brothers’ had spare time at 3.15pm, we all liked a bit of kung fu (Bruce Lee) and DBZ was it. It’s action packed to the extreme levels (special powers), and because it is animated the only limits are the limits of the creator’s mind. ‘Asians – freaky chaps’.”
We were family, a home away from home

“Every year we were getting Maori and NESians joining up who were new to Hamilton, and needed a family oriented environment to help as a stepping stone into independence. Especially for those who come to Hamilton on their own. We were a family; [a] home away from home.”
What is New Zealand culture?

” We did not really think about these films and cartoons as something foreign. In our family we had some Chinese relatives. In fact, my grandmother was Chinese. In the old days when Chinese came to New Zealand they were treated really badly...like animals. Some Maori took them as slaves. But we got together well. At the end, they and us, we all were outsiders in this country.”
(Japanese) Car Drifting Culture in NZ
Car drifting

...”[I]n a conversation that I had with Marve K’reem, one of the car enthusiasts at the gathering, he commented on the importance of modifying a car to make it individual so that it reflects his personality.(Personal conversation, 8 August 2012)”
Car drifting – play and rebellion

“Marve mentioned modifying the car himself makes the experience worthwhile and somewhat rewarding. He enjoys people appreciating his car, and showing off, he does not mind taking chances and taking part in illegal drifting to earn street status even if it means being caught by the police.”
The Japanese origin of car drifting doesn’t really matter

“It doesn’t really matter where the car drifting came from. I haven’t thought about it much until you asked the question. And then I got into research and found more about the Japanese origins of car drifting. I talked to the guys who lead it here in NZ. It doesn’t really matter for them either.”
Just enjoying car drifting with the friends

““Coolness” comes not from being connected with another culture and particularly with Japan, but from the actual activity itself. One of the guys said that when he thinks about it he realises that it originated in Japan but it really doesn’t matter when it came from. Just enjoying it here with his mates, this is what matters to them”.
Questions answered

• The question is how global, or in this context North East Asian popular culture, contributes towards local articulations of New Zealand cultural identity?
• Why do some New Zealand youth choose to consume East Asian popular culture at all?
• What does this consumption really mean in terms of articulating their own cultural identity?
• Is the discourse of East Asian popular culture is still relevant in this context?
To conclude

“...[P]opular culture, commodified and stereotyped as it often is, is not at all, as we sometimes think of it, arena where we find who we really are, the truth of our experience. It is an arena that is profoundly mythic. It is a theatre of popular desires, a theatre of popular fantasies. It is where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented, not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message, but to ourselves for the first time.” (Hall, S. (1992) What Is This “Black” in Black Popular Culture?)
Thank you