



Diffusion of Hip Hop: A Critical Reappraisal of 'Call and Response' in East Asian Street Dance Culture

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博士論文

**Diffusion of Hip Hop:
A Critical Reappraisal of ‘Call and Response’ in
East Asian Street Dance Culture**

(ヒップホップ拡散の力学：東アジアのストリート・ダンス・カルチャーにおける「コール&レスポンス」の批判的再評価)

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Abstract

This thesis explores ‘street dance’, one of the four most significant elements in hip hop culture developed in the US since the 1970s and spread into East Asian countries since the 1980s. It does so by examining its cultural diffusions in East Asia. Following the Black Power Movements in the 1960s, the hip hop pioneers (notwithstanding their ethnicities) involved in the waves of hip hop’s cultural development were fighting against poverty, racial discrimination and other societal inequalities such as police brutality and lack of education. Concerned with such class and racial issues of diffused hip hop, the thesis also examines how the cultural expression of hip hop synchronise with the East Asian cultural elements or cultural practices by drawing on Paul Gilroy’s observation of ‘call and response’ in his book *Black Atlantic* (1993). As he puts it, ‘call and response’ is an Afro-diasporic structure considered as ‘a bridge from music into other modes of cultural expression’ (Gilroy 1993: 78). The thesis argues that this structure enables hip hop culture to synchronise other cultural elements with its cultural expressions through ‘cultural appropriation’, and at the same time it distinguishes the notion of the term from its antonym ‘cultural misappropriation’ referring to negative meanings. That is, my thesis studies how ‘call and response’ functions as a process of ‘cultural appropriation’ during the formation or the transformation of hip hop. Hence, based on Gilroy’s (1993) observation, my thesis then seeks to redefine ‘call and response’ in three aspects: First of all, ‘call and response’ refers to ‘the inseparability of music and dance’. Secondly, it is a ‘repeated process of cultural appropriation’. Moreover, it is a sense of ‘hip hop diffusion’ but not limited to the geographical dissemination of hip hop.

Taking a comparative cultural studies approach, I first sort out and analyse the literature on hip hop culture, street dance and ‘call and response’. Besides, my thesis tackles hip hop-themed manga, anime, films and international contests which street dance diffuses into, in order to examine hip hop and street dance culture represented in different genres and contexts. Interviews with street dancers or reviews of street dance and hip hop culture from newspapers, magazines, and social media are the resources for my observation of practical ‘street dance’ in East Asian contexts. This thesis thus intends to reappraise ‘call and response’ through such dissection of hip hop from the dance and music aspects. To do so, I borrow Charles Taylor’s concept of ‘a language of perspicuous contrast’ (1985)—a concept in which Taylor asserts that as we challenge an alien culture’s language of self-understanding, ‘we may also challenge ours’ (1985:125). Taylor’s assertion focuses not just in one direction as such, but certainly in an extended ‘two-way’ understanding of both cultures when they encounter one another. In this sense, his concept will inform my

thesis to elaborate how hip hop culture creates alternatives to its cultural expressions by extending its self-understanding for the ‘cultural interplay’ when it diffuses.

Exploring the cultural interplay or exchange and the cultural appropriation, this thesis is composed of five chapters. Chapter 1, ‘Mapping Hip Hop in Theory’, first reviews the academic writings and journalist literature to develop the standpoints and the arguments of this research. In the findings, the most crucial matter is that the pre-existing cultural studies of hip hop barely cover ‘street dance’, but they tend to focus on ‘hip hop music’ more. Counter to pre-existing researches, this thesis explores ‘call and response’ and intends to centre upon the ‘street dance’ aspect more than the music aspect of hip hop. In this sense, drawing on Paul Gilroy’s (1993) observation, this chapter then seeks to theorise the notion of ‘call and response’ and redefine it with three senses—namely, ‘the inseparability of music and dance’, ‘cultural appropriation’, and ‘the diffusion of hip hop’ or ‘extension of street dance’—from the ‘street dance’ aspect. Finally, the chapter specifies the research approach this thesis takes while introducing the method modified from Charles Taylor’s (1985) concept of ‘a language of perspicuous contrast’ to investigate the diffusion of hip hop.

Chapter 2, “‘Bruce Lee Legend’ and Kung Fu Influence in Hip Hop Culture: Dissection of ‘Hip Hop Dance’ through an Aspect of Chinese Martial Arts’, specifies the best-known street dance genre—‘hip hop dance’—and unfolds the anatomy of street dance from the United States of the 1970s, where Kung Fu films and Chinese martial art stars such as Bruce Lee were popular amongst the youth of New York City, and it points out that these figures or icons are the insertions of this research. Through demonstrating how b-boys took to Kung Fu films, this chapter explores how they would alter the visually dynamic moves they had seen on the screen with their creativities and ‘throw’ (perform) these altered moves on the dance floor. However, it is not an accident, as argued in this chapter, that the b-boys appropriated the moves from the Kung Fu films merely because this movie genre was popular then. This chapter, hence, elaborates on why these b-boys took to Kung Fu films in particular. The chapter does so by examining the context of New York City’s popular culture in the 1970s. Also, this chapter explores how the b-boys appropriated these dynamic Kung Fu moves and transformed them into hip hop dance moves through the mechanism of ‘call and response’ (that is, ‘cultural appropriation’) by examining Kung Fu films scenes and the dancers’ bodily movements. Significantly, drawing on M. K. Kato’s (2007) standpoint, I argue that the encounter between Kung Fu and hip hop, as representative of a popular cultural revolution, may empower hip hop to confirm its possibilities to synchronise, regenerate and become shareable.

Chapter 3, ‘Japanese Street Dance Culture in Manga and Anime: Hip Hop Transcription in *Samurai*

Champoo and *Tokyo Tribe-2*', elaborates on this idea by supporting the examples of hip hop diffusions in manga and anime to examine how street dance culture or hip hop synchronised with local elements in Japanese subcultures. I attempt to analyse how representation of hip hop in anime *Samurai Champloo* (2004-05), manga *Tokyo Tribe-2* (1997-2005) and its anime adaptation *Tokyo Tribes* (2006-07) transcribes the hip hop elements. The hip hop transcription with an anachronist setting in *Samurai Champloo* in particular depicts protagonist Mugen, an impoverished Ryukyuan ronin samurai, and his journey fighting against a Daikan's (local governor) suppression and the Edo shogunate system. I argue that such an anachronist scheme was intended to transcribe the general context of hip hop into a Japanese backdrop to call for the domestic awareness of racial or ethnic issues such as the BLM event in Japan. Yet, due to the diffusion of hip hop, manga and anime representation of hip hop is not limited to domestic consumption and awareness. That is, such hip hop diffusion also became another wave of the hip hop movements. In brief, I hence conclude that the diffusion of hip hop into Japanese manga and anime representation creates an alternative way of cultural expression, which is reversible. Furthermore, such 'cultural interplay' finally extends the possibilities of the culture to find new elements for its cultural expressions.

In Chapter 4, 'Hip Hop against Gender Roles: Transformed Yingge Performance under Street Dance Disguise in Chinese Film *Ying Ge Hun*', I analyse another textual diffusion of hip hop by exploring the film representations of street dance to argue that 'hip hop is against gender roles'. This is based on a solid example of Chinese director Yi Huang's film *Ying Ge Hun* (2019). I utilise this film to gainsay the criticism of feminine voices missing in the street dance society, as exemplified by the engagement of the heroine Wenqi in the last performance number. The film represents the diffusion of street dance into Chinese folk dance Yingge ('hero's song') by the youths from Teochew, Canton, a southern province in China. That is where the residents were and are suffering from poverty and have to leave their hometown to earn their livings. Besides, the film casts Taiwanese street dancers Yide 'Popping Ed' Tian and Yan-Jhen 'Nikki' Chen, who attends the dance contest TV programme *Zhe! Jiushi Jiewu (Street Dance of China)* (2018). In other words, the representation of hip hop in *Ying Ge Hun* schemes to transcribe the US hip hop context to the Chinese social issues such as wealth inequality in the marginalised south. Meanwhile, the film casting also shows its respect to hip hop culture by involving street dancers in its production. Hence, this chapter examines the transformation and the genderless expression of hip hop from both the fictional representation and the practical street dance scenes in China. Finally, I conclude that hip hop is against gender roles and that this is furthermore explicit by examining the hip hop transformation due to its diffusion.

Chapter 5, 'Hip Hop Diffusion from the US to Taiwan: Policing, Transformation and Gentrification of Street Dance', first reveals the relationships between main 'street dance' forms and their musical influences by disclosing their formative backgrounds in the US. Second, I seek to examine this transformed street dance culture in Taiwan and explore the alteration of street dance culture interplays between Taiwan and China through the dancers' exchange of dance skills and knowledge. Like Chinese hip hop, the alteration of street dance culture in Taiwan is due to the dancers' breakthrough of the country's cultural censorship. This brought fruitful results: the 'regeneration' of street dance culture in Taiwan, including the Taiwanese street dancers' efforts to showcase their dance skills in international street dance competitions and extend the possibilities of hip hop's bodily, cultural expression. Furthermore, Chapter 5 also explores Taiwanese street dance culture under globalisation by tackling the Olympic inclusion of breakdancing in 2024 Paris and the gentrification of hip hop, as well as contextualising the change of street dancers' minds to leave China and relocate their dance careers to Taiwan during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Furthermore, I examine the collaboration of Taiwanese rap singers DJ Didilong and Soft Lipa, as well as street dancers such as Popping Ed and Krazybonez involved in the music video 'Shuige' (2020), a fictitious, transnational hip hop space demonstrating the homogeneity and heterogeneity of the culture under globalisation. Significantly, I argue that the articulation of Taiwanese hip hop's self-definition in its (non-)verbal expression turned out to be powerful and remain 'socially and politically conscious' both at home and abroad, exemplifying with b-boy Bojin's breakdancing career.

The Conclusion draws on Bruce Lee and his philosophy of Chinese Kung Fu again to echo the introduction. It will briefly review the theoretical framework and the research method proposed in this study and turn to review the findings of each chapter. Moreover, it also points out the significance of the study as well as the future of the hip hop and street dance cultural studies. Last but not least, by quoting Gabriel Entiope's *Negroes, Dance, Resistance* (1996), the thesis reminds its readers of the 'social and political consciousness' of street dance.