

**“Cool” Asia in a Local Context:
East Asian popular culture in a
New Zealand classroom**

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East Asian Popular Culture, Critical Pedagogy and Undergraduate Curricula

- “What is it about pedagogy that allows cultural studies theories to ignore it?” (Giroux, 1994:130)
- “East Asian Popular Culture and Its Impact on the West”  “East Meets West: East Asian Popular Culture and Its Impact on the West”

Questions to consider

What does consumption of East Asian popular culture really mean?

What does it tell us, not only about the popular culture itself, but about us as consumers of this culture?

How do we understand different popular culture genres produced in a very different and unfamiliar cultural context?

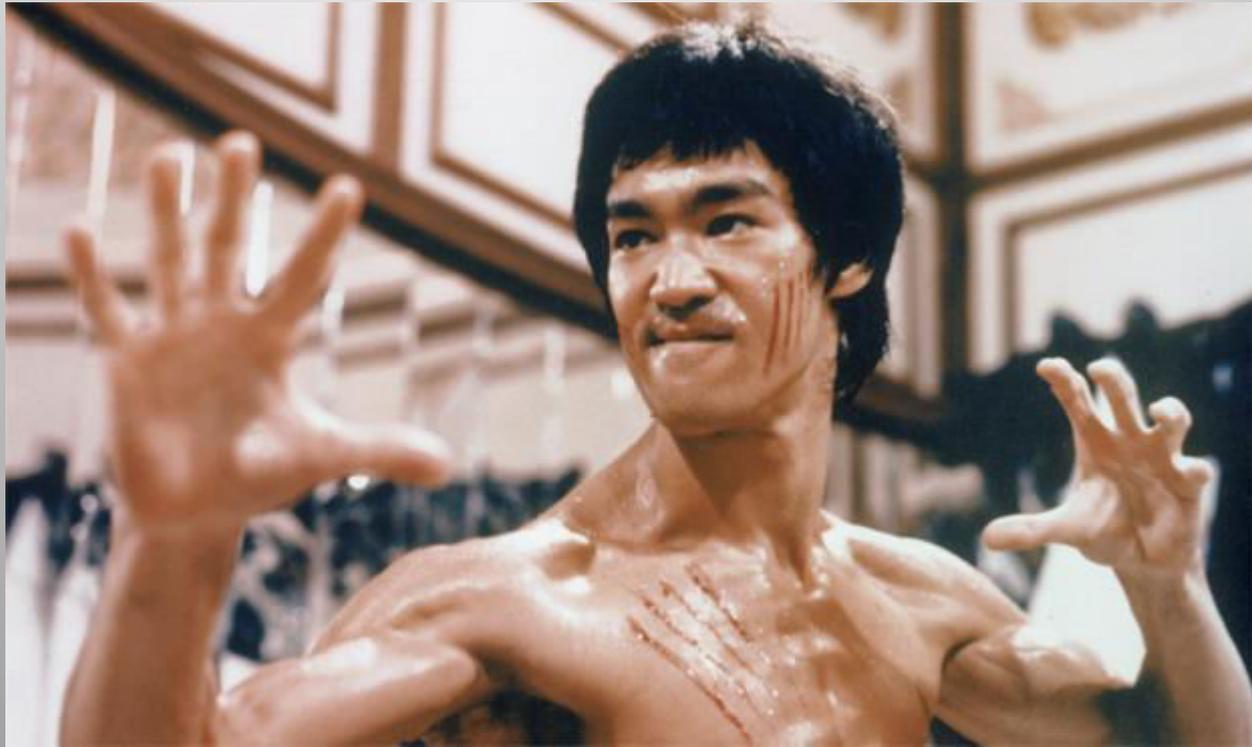
Do these cultural differences manifested in popular culture matter for my students?

Critical pedagogy and East Asian popular culture

One of the underling motives of critical pedagogy is “understanding how student identities, cultures, and experiences provide the basis for learning” (Giroux, 1993: 182)

My aim was to unpack students’ reading of popular culture texts, and to identify possible links between the text and their cultural identity

Links between East Asian Popular Culture and student's own cultural identity



Martial Arts Movies

“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”

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 Arts films. Martial Arts movies were seen as a form of escapism from real life and, in extreme cases, the characters seemed mythical and mysterious.”

A New Role Models

“[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.”

Dragon Ball Z (ドラゴンボールZ(ゼット))

Doragon Bōru Zetto



Dragon Ball Z (ドラゴンボールZ(ゼット))

“We all saw ourselves as being set apart from others, for a few reasons. Mainly we were Maori and on similar wavelengths at the time i.e. into our sports, the 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.”

'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 Nesianians 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.”



(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

“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 origins 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 I decided to choose this topic for my assignment. 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 his 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 where it came from. Just enjoying it here with his mates, this is what matters to them”.

Teed Street in Newmarket



Teed Street in Newmarket

“Orientalism explains the pre-existing knowledge of the western people about Asia.

I have mentioned Orientalism in this essay because kiwi did not accept Asians at first.

They were surrounded by the knowledge they already had about Asians, this knowledge was spread around the world by people from Western countries.

Teed Street in Newmarket

I did not think about it at first, but when I was talking to a friend, I realised that when one visits an Asian shop on Teed Street, they do not say: “I am going to buy something from the vegetable shop”. They just say, “I am going to the Asian vegetable shop”. There is no any other vegetable shop in Newmarket except Asian shops. Why to say this?”

Teed Street in Newmarket

“Then I realised that this knowledge that Westerners have about Asia is wrong. For me, being an Asian myself, I never use this word for myself and I have never heard someone from Korea, Japan or China, say that they are Asian. I do agree that Asia is the continent from where Asian people came from.

Teed Street in Newmarket

But in my view the word ‘Asian’ is given by Westerners to describe people from Asia because they cannot differentiate them. There are many countries which are part of Asia and Westerners cannot name each of them. So making the process easy for themselves, they started calling all the people from Asia, “Asian”.”