

Global Identity and Culture Transmission

Miu Yin Ha, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

The Asian Conference on Cultural Studies 2017
Official Conference Proceedings

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

In the 80s, the Hong Kong entertainment and cultural scene were more liberal compared to present times as they were able to absorb foreign culture despite the gap between eastern and western countries. Hong Kong established a local culture by using foreign culture as reference, which was called a culture moment. Hong Kong tried to retain the Chinese culture, and also learnt from Europe and Japan at the same time, which helped create Hong Kong's unique style. There were intermediaries who acted as important agents and experienced the collaboration of cross-nation culture and they became popular and well known to the community. To investigate such roles of intermediaries, qualitative researches were conducted on relevant editor in music magazines in 80s with in-depth face to face interviews. This essay strives to identify and map adapted songs and their ubiquitous influence among the Cantopop industry in the context of globalization.

This research aims to dissect the roles of cultural intermediaries and examine how they popularized Japanese Pop Music in Hong Kong. However, it also argues that the popularity of Japanese Pop Music in Hong Kong should be attributed to the localizing actions and efforts of the cultural intermediaries themselves. Diving deeper, it suggests that their contributions in discovering, deciding, directing and diffusing such Pop Music has greatly eased its introduction by conforming to local tastes and demands.

In order to determine the role of cultural intermediaries in the spread of Japanese pop music to Hong Kong, case study of magazine publisher will be examined to investigate the functions in such process.

1.1 Sam Jor – The Agent who promoted Japanese Rock Music to Hong Kong

This section will examine the contributions of Sam Jor as an agent. He is the founder of a local music magazine, *Music Week*, and organized many rock music shows in Hong Kong since the late 70s. He organized concerts mainly for foreign performers including Japanese bands and rock stars. Sam is still in the field today, maintaining the Facebook Fan page of *Music Week*, which acts as a channel on social media to share international music with fans. (Jor, personal communication, Nov, 19, 2011)

Sam Jor played various roles in the music industry. He worked as a music critic and host of a radio program in RTHK during the 80s, where his intensive knowledge in local and foreign rock music attracted many fans. As a founder, editor and writer of the magazine *Music Week*, he inspired many other music agents in publishing music magazines. He was a show organizer, who organized many rock band concerts locally and internationally. With all the experience and reputation gained from these roles, he became the director of Amuse Hong Kong, a Japanese entertainment corporation, thus proving the trust between him and Japanese agents. In addition to being an agent, he also represented the company and developed the AMUSE business in Hong Kong.

This section will attempt to explore Sam Jor's contributions. The first section will discuss the impact of Japanese rock bands in Hong Kong. It will also compare Sam Jor with Charles Lam and Pato Leung in their contributions to the development of

Japanese culture in Hong Kong. Moreover, the production of Japanese music and its influence in the Hong Kong pop scene will also be discussed.

1.2 From Radio DJ to Cultural Agent

When Jor was young, he encountered western pop music through radio programs, which included The Beatles, Woodstock. Then he gradually became attracted to foreign music genres and songs. He was a fan of foreign music magazines, which provided him with music knowledge. Although he was raised in a middle class family, he worked hard to finance his purchases for records.

In 1969, when Jor was still a student, he started writing music articles for local newspapers and magazines introducing foreign and local music. One of the magazines he worked for was *Hong Kong Youth Weekly* (香港青年週報), where the chief editor was Shum Kwun-Nam (岑崑南), a popular movie critic. Jor's early works included music critiques of a popular music band "Deep Purple" in *Youth Weekly*. He was also a Radio DJ in Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK). Many of the radio program audience became his followers, admiring his knowledge and vision on music. Therefore, when he started *Music Week*, some of those music fans became readers of the magazine.

"Norman was one of the readers who was familiar with me when I was still a columnist in *Hong Kong Youth Weekly*," Jor said. (Jor, personal communication, 2011)

Norman was also an avid fan of Jor's radio program. Norman used to take a portable radio and went to the rooftop of his house to listen to the radio whenever Jor was in air. Now Norman has his own restaurant in Areia Preta of Macau. When Sam Jor went to visit him, Jor found that Norman had decorated his restaurant with many posters of rock stars with "Rock & Roll" background music of the 80s. Jor was amazed by the degree of influence that he had on this fan.

Jor then met Mr. Wan Way-Kuen, who was working as an editor in *Hong Kong Youth Weekly* as well. He invited Jor to start up a new music magazine so that they can introduce their favorite music with less editorial constraints. Together they invested approximately HKD 90,000 for the business in 1975. Although they did not have much experience in magazine publishing, they started their own publication, *Music Week*, on 4th April 1975. There were only three people in the team initially, which included Edwin, Hong Ka-Chun and Vivian. All operational tasks including researching, writing, editing, proofreading and layout designing were done by themselves. Unfortunately, the business was not very profitable it hemorrhaged a lot money as a result. Despite the loss, his business partner Mr. Wan Wai-Kuen and Sam stayed, waiting for another chance to start it up again (Jor, 2012). They were successful in the later years before the magazine came to an end and recently *Music Week* is available to be seen again with a price of \$15 for two episodes in digital version.

During that period, only few a music programs were dedicated to introducing indie music and rock music Hence, he wrote a letter to RTHK suggesting to develop a music program to introduce foreign music His suggestion was accepted, and his

career started in RTHK as a scriptwriter. Mr. Siu Leong was the presenter of the program who read Jor's scripts to introduce foreign music and indie music. As the budget for producing the program was reduced later, Jor became the presenter of the radio program "In Rock" (樂在其中), introducing his music on air by himself.

Jor's dedication could be shown through how despite budget cuts, he was still willing to continue his work for no pay. He frequently introduced albums purchased by himself (Jor, personal communication, Nov, 19, 2011), because most of them were not yet released in Hong Kong. Over the next three years, Sam continued to manage the business and operation of *Music Week* while being a DJ at the same time. Later on, he shifted his focus to his magazine and music show operation. With the knowledge and reputation gained from different music magazines as well as his strong network within the industry, he began to organize music concerts in Hong Kong for foreign performers. He gained a positive reputation for the amount of effort and dedication he put into his work. Even after he quitted the job as a radio host, his music critiques and articles were well received. As Wong C.C. wrote on his book "Echo":

Sam Jor contributed to bring the MTV culture and radio music trend through his magazine "*Music week*" and his program "*Enjoy yourself*" and this is a very important for the rise of foreign music culture here in Hong Kong. (Wong, 2007:45)

Jor was often referred as the "*Father of Rock*" in Hong Kong by the media. During his career in the music industry, he introduced a lot of Japanese heavy metal bands to Hong Kong. According to Jor, the 70s was a good timing for Japanese rock bands to enter the Hong Kong market (*Music week*, 2013). He was the first agent to introduce BOWOW's music to Hong Kong in 1975. Jor was also involved in organizing local concerts and shows for Hong Kong local bands such as Ramband. Through this, his reputation as an agent and professional music organizer gradually increased. During this time, Hong Kong rock music fan base also developed and grew. In the 80s, the amount of rock fans in Hong Kong increased significantly when compared with the 70s. It was a good timing for Japanese rock bands to enter the Hong Kong market. Most of the readers of *Music Week* were fans of rock music. Around 10000 copies were often sold per issue, hence when the concerts of Japanese rock stars were promoted in magazines, tickets were often sold out in a short period of time. (Jor, personal communication, 2011)

1.3 Material Practices

"We should treasure the power and influence of mass media, and make good use of it, build up and maintain a good reputation when we are in the field, and we should not lose the confidence from the readers" (Jor, personal communication, Nov, 19, 2011). During the author's interview with Sam Jor, he stated that his mission was reflected throughout important contributions he made with his various roles, especially with the involvement in mass media industry as a radio DJ and co-founder of a local music magazine.

Multiple role as a Major Rock Show Organizer

Jor organized many concerts for Hong Kong rock bands in the early stage of his career as an agent, including “Ramband” and “We”. These concerts also gave the local bands an opportunity to collaborate with famous foreign rock bands such as “Girl” from Britain, Bon Jovi, Depeche Mode, and the rock band “JAPAN” from England whose music attracted many fans from Hong Kong and overseas. Also, at concerts such as “Live from the Underground” held at Ko Shan Stadium, Jor invited many English bands to perform. Various music styles such as post punk, heavy metal, gothic and electronic were also introduced through the concerts.

As Jor became more and more experienced as a concert organizer, his network within the entertainment field and show business grew. He imported important western music records to the Hong Kong market. In addition, he organized groundbreaking music concerts, which mainly featured rock and electronic music, such as The Police, Culture Club, Depeche Mode, Japan, and OMD. Jor also arranged exclusive interviews for “*Music Week*”. For instance, in issue 25, there was an article titled - “Exclusive news-The band Tubes –Mick Jagger’s favorite new band”. This was the first time that a magazine has covered for this band (*Music Week*, 1975 : 4)

Jor built up good connections with the Japanese agents by meeting rock bands in Japan. He also invited Takanaka Masayoshi (高中正義) and Chyi Chin (齊秦) to perform together with Santana in Taipei in 1986. Other concerts which Jor had organized included Oda Kazumasa (小田和正), Loudness and Pink Cloud. Being able to organize a concert together with these artists who were all from different agencies demonstrated his vast connections with various Japanese agents.

Jor introduced the music of Yellow Magic Orchestra (YMO) to Hong Kong during the mid 80s through *Music Week*. Subsequently, he organized a performance in Hong Kong for Matsutake Hideki (松武秀樹), who was one of the members of YMO. This is a typical method employed by Jor to introduce new artists to Hong Kong. This was done through the use of various media channels, music articles in his magazine, and finally importing some albums to satisfy the market’s demand. Once a large fan base was developed, Jor could then organize a live performance for the artist or band in Hong Kong and Asia. Nevertheless, Jor stressed that his choice of music should be independent from profit considerations, and good music should be selected with his musical instinct, knowledge and experience: “The more music you explore, the better instinct you will develop for yourself. You can tell whether it is good music or not, and select only the really good ones to be shared with the others.”

The first issue of *Music Week* was released in April 1975. Its main theme was “Rock and Roll will never die” and it was sold at the price of fifty cents per copy. In these early issues, Jor mainly focused on western music and both he and his writers introduced music bands that were unpopular or virtually unknown to Hong Kong at that time. (Wan, 1978). However, as one of his partners was more familiar with Japanese music, this partner devoted a weekly section of the magazine to introduce and analyze different Japanese music to readers (the editor, 2013). Some of the information was extracted from Japanese magazines, while the writers of *Music Week* was also able to obtain first hand information as they had connections with Japanese friends in the field. “The sales volume of *Music Week* was not very high at the

beginning,” said Sam Jor. “Only a few thousand copies were sold weekly in the beginning, however, it increased to more than twenty thousand in the mid 80’s.” (Jor, personal communication, Nov, 19, 2011).

Music Week focused on the foreign music scene but covered Japanese news every week in a different column. For example in issue 26, there were reports about “Tour of Carpenters and Suze Quatro in Japan”, “Limited edited photo of Saijo Hideiki game”, “The new group from Hong Kong-Shells Brother and Sister Band in Japan” and “Entertainment flash of Japan”. (Wan,1975 : 1-8)

By establishing a music magazine and introducing foreign songs in radio programs, Jor successfully brought a new music style to Hong Kong: Japanese music. This also inspired other people to develop their own music magazines. Jor had introduced a new trend to society, which was a remarkable milestone in the music field.

1.4 Contribution

Besides *Music Week*, magazines such as *Youth Weekly* (現代青年人周報), *New time Magazine* (新時代), *100 Marks Magazine* (100分) and *Sisters* (姊妹) were also popular entertainment magazines for young people in the 80s. Much of the contents in those magazines were adapted from the Japanese magazines, like *Star* (明星) and *Natural* (平凡).

Although many Hong Kong fans were unable to speak or read Japanese, they were still fond of Japanese music and rock bands. Jor believed that language is not a barrier, and good quality music would always attract people. With this vision and belief, *Music Week* was more than just a printed magazine that delivered music news to readers. It also served as a platform for music sharing among fans and the editors. During that period, due to lack of modern telecommunication devices, readers of *Music Week* would come to the editor’s office to meet the team, chat and explore music from all around the world, with some of them becoming friends due to this contact.

The scope of Sam Jor’s content contribution in *Music Week* was more international when compared with the magazines available at the time. “There were no one doing this (music magazine with much editorial freedom and less concern on profit-making) in the market, so we did it by ourselves, that was our initiative and starting point for *Music Week*.” said Sam. Some albums which were not officially released yet which were introduced on the magazine were purchased and imported by Sam Jor. Furthermore, Jor and his friends played an integral role in providing inside stories behind the scene. There were very few translated articles in the magazine, as Sam Jor and his team conducted most of the interviews themselves. His partner speaks Japanese, allowing them to serve as a reporter and writer without the need of a translator. Moreover, Gerry, another writer in *Music Week*, married a Japanese wife due to his interest in Japanese culture.

These writers often used a travelogue style to introduce Japanese songs and showed interesting inside stories from visiting record companies. They did so in an attempt to raise the level of public interest and acceptance towards Japanese music. Besides,

Jor's close relationship with artists and their agents often gave him first hand information about new songs or trends of the scene. For example, he befriended Paul McCartney, and went to see McCartney's concert in Tokyo while also meeting BOWOW's Yamamoto there. They were not experienced reporters and did not prepare in advance for their article's writing style and content.

One of the unique characteristics of Japanese rock bands was their similarity with western style rock bands. Moreover, the Japanese emphasized on band image, while integrating elements of western rock. Therefore, such "repackaged" bands, which were catered to Asian taste, was suitable to be introduced in Hong Kong. "Popularity of Japanese rock music in Hong Kong was not very much related to economic growth." Sam Jor said. He also commented that although fewer people attended rock concerts than pop music concerts, rock concerts had a much more loyal fan base. Jor stated "There are always some people who are interested in alternative choices of music. If people really like something, you would save money and spend on it." (Jor, personal communication, Nov, 19, 2011).

Jor never misses a chance to discover the best Japanese rock music in the 80s. Once he went to the Artist Theatre to watch the Japanese top rock group "Creation" in Roppongi. He went to the back stage and met Kazuro Takeda. Jor didn't know any Japanese at all but he still had the chance to do an interview with Mr. Takeda for a column of *Music Week*. Then famous Singer Mr. Danny Summer told Jor that he loved the music of Creation was impressed by Jor's recommendation. After that, Danny and Mr. Takeda became friends and invited him as a guest to his concert in 2007.

Many of the record companies at the time would put up advertisements in *Music Week*, due to its ability to reach its intended target audience. Many of *Music Week*'s readers were music lovers and were willing to spend money on music shows and foreign music albums. However, certain imported records still did not sell well in Hong Kong despite the good contents. Jor would sometimes identify these "hidden gems", and then introduce them in *Music Week*, and their popularity and sales would then be boosted. One of such cases involved the UK rock band JAPAN, whose members included David Sylvain, Mick Karn, Steve Jansen, Richard Barbieri and Rob Dean. Jor became acquainted with their UK agent, and arranged a live performance for them in Hong Kong, which turned out to be a big success although the band was not popular in Hong Kong before Jor's introduction.

In the eighties and nineties, many Japanese companies were very eager to export Japanese culture to other countries. Jor kept exploring opportunities to introduce Japanese rock music in the entertainment field, but it was not easy for him. Since Japanese people's work attitude was very careful, they would research and investigate every proposal carefully before investing in the project. They would choose their collaborators very carefully by thoroughly researching their backgrounds. This included company loyalty, credibility and reputation of a person before making a decision on joint projects and investment.

Amuse has been one of the Japan's largest entertainment groups in Hong Kong and according to the Amuse website, the company started its Hong Kong branch in 1991. At that time, Amuse Japan had signed popular artists like Southern All Stars, BOW-

WOW, and Bakufu-Slump (爆風Slump), with an ambitious plan to develop their business further in the Asia-Pacific region. Although Hong Kong was just a small market compared with Mainland China and other large cities in South East Asia, Amuse Japan believed it was the best choice to open their branch in Hong Kong. After extensive research and meetings with Jor, the management of Amuse understood him as a capable agent who was the right person to act as the president of their overseas branch.

Jor was appointed by Amuse Japan as the Director of Amuse Hong Kong. At the time, Jor did not intend to apply for this position. “I was travelling to Japan with Beyond (the Hong Kong rock band) to visit the Vice President of Amuse Japan at his house. Then, all of the sudden, I was announced as the president of Amuse.”, said Sam Jor during the interview. He understood that he is not a businessman, but he created the chance for Beyond to perform in Japan and introduced them to Amuse. They would cooperate with him even without formal contracts, as Jor was a professional and experienced organizer of many concerts in Hong Kong. With this trust, Jor became the first agent to introduce Bakufu-Slump (爆風Slump) to Hong Kong, Singapore and Bangkok. He organized concerts for them, as part of his efforts to help Amuse to explore overseas markets such as Hong Kong.

For Japanese entertainment agencies, the contracts with artists were similar to those in Hong Kong. Salaries were offered to artists on a monthly basis. The agency would be responsible for management, job arrangements and promotions for their artists. Sometimes accommodation and living allowances would also be offered.

1.5 Reasons of Success

Jor was a paramount figure in the introduction of foreign rock and roll music from Europe. He was praised as the “father of rock and roll”, and introduced music with “personality jocks” style as described in Tony Bennett’s book *“Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, institutions”*:

“While it was still possible to segregate juke boxes, record stores, dance halls and night clubs, it was no longer possible to segregate the airwaves. In growing numbers, white as well as black listeners chose to tune their radio dials to the archetypically fast-talking 'personality jocks', as the R & B DJs were called.” (Bennett, 1993: 235).

Jor represented an important agent that introduced Japanese R & B band and music to Hong Kong fans. Japanese rock music was attractive with an enticing melody. The stunning appearance of the performers catered to the interests of young people. The music was very popular among fans although most of them did not understand the contents. Some of the lyrics were in English and with some familiar Chinese characters and English translations. Altogether, this allowed the adapted music to become a different genre from other pop songs.

Magazine publishers created a network of information of Japanese idols, culture and music. This had opened a door for Hong Kong citizens to discover Japanese music and culture. However, printed media were limited to information transporting. Their influences were varied by the level of interest that the public had towards their

magazines. Moreover, songs cannot be directly delivered through printed medias. The need of more direct promotion of Japanese is seen. In terms of the selection, transformation and promotion of Japanese songs, DJs and music producers, which would be introduced in the next chapter, would show their influence and impact on the phenomenon of Japanese music importation. All in all, although all three intermediaries all pursued this pathway with different goals in mind, they were still successful in introducing Japanese culture to Hong Kong.

2. The New Era of Music Trend in the 80s

The above stated factors were crucial in importing Japanese music in the 80s. In fact, the author argues that the above stated factors were interdependent. These factors did not stand alone. For example, if Cultural Intermediaries had sufficient discovery towards Japanese music yet did not choose the right timing to promote them, the importation of Japanese music wouldn't be as successful in the 80s. Although there were environmental factors which determined the success of importation, it is truly the human factors that will react to these environmental conditions by taking appropriate actions, thus making the importation of culture a success and unique. The recipients of their music selection also plays a role as a cultural consumer. For instance, they play an active role in providing feedback to these Cultural Intermediaries which might influence music selection and choice.

The thesis is successful in till limitations such as having access to more data and interviews from Japanese Artists. Increasing the scope of research subjects such as recipients of Japanese music can allow the author to obtain more perspectives to compare with Cultural Intermediaries. Moreover, the old patterns of expertise and institutional authority will be challenged in the new century and further research could be obtained.

In addition, Japanese music has recently spread to a much wider scope, such as Mainland China and other South East countries. Looking forward to the 21st century, Japanese music is no longer as phenomenal as it was in the 80s. However, its influence could still be seen in Hong Kong's society. It has been overshadowed by the recent rise in K-pop where it has been able to garner public interests by promoting a new genre of music with dancing singers and electronic music. Ultimately, Japanese Culture has assimilated to such an extent in Hong Kong that it is considered as an irreplaceable facet of Hong Kong culture.

References

- Beck, U (2000) *What is Globalization ?* (p. 46-47). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Chun, A. J., Rossiter, N., & Shoesmith, B. (2004). *Refashioning pop music in Asia: Cosmopolitan flows, political tempos, and aesthetic industries*. New York, NY: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Clayton, M., & Herbert, T. (2003). 'Music and biocultural Evolution', in *The Cultural study of music* (p.23-30). Richard Middleton Psychology Press.
- Esselink, B. (2000). A practical guide to localization.(p.1). John Benjamins Publishing.
- Fairchild, Charles (2014). Popular Music in *Cultural Intermediaries case studies*. (p.125-133). London: Sage
- Frith, S. (1992). 'The industrialization of popular music', in *Popular music and communication* (p.53-77). Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Garofalo, R. (1993). 'Black popular music: crossing over or going under', in T. Bennett, S. Frith, L. Grossberg, J. Shepherd and G. Turner (eds.) *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions* (p.235). Psychology Press.
- Howes, D. (1996, 2002). *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities*. (p.1-8). London: Routledge.
- Iwabuchi, K. (2002A). 'The 1990s – Japan's return to Asia in the Age of Globalization.' & 'Localizing Japan', in *Recentring Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Translationalism* (p.1-4,97-98). London: Duke University Press.
- Keohane, R. & Nye, J. (2000) Globalization: What's New? What's Not? (And So What?) in *Foreign Policy*, (p. 105). Spring 2000
- Leung, F. (1997, December 22). Japan Craze in Hong Kong. Hong Kong Economic Times. (In Chinese)
- Mattews, J., & Maguire, J. S. (2014). 'Introduction', in *Cultural Intermediaries* (p.1, 104-5). London: Sage
- Minami, H. (2003). *The Japanese Theory: From Meiji Restoration to the Present*. New Century
- Ritzer, G. (1998). *The McDonalization Thesis: Explanations and Extensions*.(pg.2) London: Sage
- Robertson (2013). *Global Society in Globalization*.(p.28) John wiley & Sons.
- Shimizu, A. (2013). Colonialism and the development of modern anthropology in Japan in J. van Bremen, & A. Shimizu, *Anthropology and Colonialism in Asia: Comparative and Historical Colonialism* (p. 161). London: Routledge.

Smith, J.M. (2009). 'Transnationalization and Globalization's Affect on Modern Shakuhachi Player's Value', in *Transnationalizing Culture of Japan in Asia* (p. 95). Ateneo De Manila University Press.

Storm, C & Harrison, M. (2007). '*Because they Look Real*': Watching Japanese TV Drama Among Taiwanese Youth. (132). Germany: Hubert & Co., Gottingen.

Stevens, C.S. (2012). 'Definitions', in *Japanese Popular Music: Culture, Authenticity and Power* (p.29-30). London: Routledge.

Tam, P. (2002). *Japanese popular culture in Hong Kong: case studies of youth consumption of cute products and fashion magazines*. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong.

Witzleben, J. Lawrence. (1999). "Cantopop and Mandapop in Pre-postcolonial Hong Kong Identity Negotiation in the Performances of Anita Mui Yim-Fong. "*Popular Music* Vol. 18/2, 241-258. Cambridge University Press.

Wong, C.C. (2007). 'Shaping the Hong Kong Sound', in *Hong Kong's Pop Soundscapes*. (p.45, 59,131-134) Hong Kong: Home Affairs Bureau/SAR.

Wong, C.W. (1990). *Forty Years of Cantopop*. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing. (2000). *Hong Kong Cantopop at the early stage: 1950-1974*. Hong Kong; Joint Publishing.

Wong, J. (1995). 'Popular Songs and Hong Kong Culture', in E. Sinn (Ed.), *Hong Kong Culture and Society*.
(2003). *The Rise and Decline of Cantopop: A Study of Hong Kong Popular Music (1949-1997)*. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong.

Contact email: sweedie818@yahoo.com.hk