The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus
In-depth critical analysis of the forces shaping the Asia-Pacific...and the world.

The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 11, Issue 5, No. 1, February 4, 2013.

Straight Outta Ichimiya: The Appeal of a Rural Japanese Rapper 一宮から来たぞ！　田舎ラッパーの魅力

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下流社会からこんにちは。オレら生きていいすか、お偉いさん?

Hello from the lower classes! Do you mind if we go on living, proud elites?

—Dengaryū feat. stillichimiya, "Yabee ikioi de sugee moriagaru" (2012)

Dengaryū (Tamura Takashi, b. 1982) is one of the breakout Japanese rappers of 2012. Several music journals, including Japan's longest-running popular music magazine, *Music Magazine*, as well as the web journal *Ototoy*, have anointed his second album, *B kyū eiga no yōni 2*, the best hip-hop album of the year. As the music critic Futatsugi Shin wrote in his year-end assessment in *Music Magazine,* "[Dengaryū] throws himself full-force, dealing with politics, society, the individual, music, hell-raising, and love—all with the same strong attitude and language. An impressive, moving work"; Urata Takeshi added, "Never wavering from his real-life stance, even with political messages, he speaks of the strength and the universal from the point of view of the have-nots, sublimated into highly entertaining hip-hop."[1] Fans are similarly moved by his "frank revelation and serious treatment of a flawed humankind and twisted society" with "passion and rawness," making him "more real than American rappers today."[2] Not only has the rapper garnered accolades but also choice spots in hip-hop showcases by the hip-hop aggregation site Amebreak, club music record store Manhattan Records, and others. What is remarkable about this acclaim is not only the fact that his label, Mary Joy Recordings, is an independent label without ties to the major record companies,[3] but also his origins: Dengaryū is based not in Tokyo or Osaka, but in his hometown in Yamanashi Prefecture, better known for Mt. Fuji than as a cradle of hip-hop culture. He has even fashioned his stage name—田我流—to recall an image of water flowing through a farm field.[4]

What has attracted Dengaryū and other musicians from rural areas to hip-hop, a genre that originally emerged from American cities and African-American life? What aspects of his songs have captured the attention of other, mainly urban, Japanese? Having recently caught up with Dengaryū and Young-G, his trackmaker[5] and childhood friend, in an interview, I explain some of the factors behind Dengaryū's appeal—his realness, engagement with current politics, and musicality—as illustrated through his lyrics, music, and videos.

Dengaryū's attraction to hip-hop

Dengaryū was born and raised in Ichinomiya-chō, a town of 11,000 in Yamanashi Prefecture. As he was growing up in an unstable household, his grandfather encouraged him to read literature, which instilled in him a love for words.[6] This delight in words also attracted him in high school to hip-hop, when he and Young-G began listening to Japanese rap groups like Buddha Brand. As he explained, "The words are heard very directly. . . It's really easy to hear them. I was really caught by the punch of the words. Even words that don't have much meaning resonate—you could say them in a cool way. That really struck me by surprise. The words have much more punch than other genres of music." For similar reasons, Dengaryū was also drawn to Japanese underground folk of the 1960s and 70s, which he also considers to be "poetic expression in rhythmical style" as well as oppositional music (Dengaryū, interview with the author, 2012).

He and Young-G, who puts together many of his musical background tracks, were also attracted to hip-hop because of its "fat" beats: "In a band, the drums are light—'kakakaka!' In hip-hop, the snares are like, Gan! They make more impact. Don, don, Gan! We'd been used to listening to music with high-pitched sounds. In hip-hop, the sound of the rhythm section is very fat and heavy, low and groovy" (Dengaryū, interview, 2012).

Dengaryū, as pictured on the album cover of *B kyū eiga no yōni 2*.

His attraction to hip-hop was reawakened during his two-year stay in the United States, attending a two-year college in upstate New York. Dengaryū was playing in a psychedelic noise band when he became friends with an African-American student; among this friend's entourage was a hustler. As he explained,

> . . . while we were hanging out with [this hustler], I got to know his personal history—the conditions into which he was born and grew up. . . He taught me a lot. I came to understand something of his culture and the kind of place from where this music came. For example, I came to understand why there was such concern over money in the music and lyrics—they don't have any. There were a lot of guys crossing themselves while hustling because they couldn't do anything else. Their choices were to work for $5 an hour at McDonalds, go to jail, or hustle. Here were people whose lives had fallen apart, who were drinking on the streets, living on welfare. And as I came to understand these conditions, I thought, there is no other music that strikes the heart as much as hip-hop. The music was very positive: it was the opposite reflection of reality. They would take something negative and turn it into something positive. The power of this music was tremendous. They also taught me a lot about [black] culture, like its classic music and films. I thought it all went very deep. [Black popular culture] wasn't just about having fun. I felt I got to understand the real meaning of hip-hop. And compared with the abstract expression of the noise music I was then making, I thought I would prefer to express my thoughts more directly, in words. (Dengaryū, interview, 2012)

Young-G joined Dengaryū in the United States for three months. The experience left him with a similar impression:

> I worked with African-Americans in making hip-hop tracks, hanging out together, and living with them. . . Up until then, I had been listening mainly to Japanese rap, although I did listen to some African-American rap. But over there, we were experiencing hip-hop being made under completely different conditions from what we had previously known. After having experienced the real hip-hop in the US and felt it in my gut, I was amazed by its power and wanted to try doing it myself more seriously. So I went back to Japan and started stillichimiya. (Young-G, interview, 2012)

"Another factor," added Dengaryū, "was that we had more time than we knew what to do with being in the countryside, without much money for going out to the *izakaya* (pub). As long as you have the equipment, you can make music for free."

Realness: Regions and economic marginality

Early works

The name of the hip-hop crew—still Ichimiya—is a protest against the government's forced merger of six towns and villages, including Ichinomiya-chō, to form the city of Fuefuki-shi in 2004, as a way of saving administrative costs and resources. The group's core members include rappers and trackmakers Big Ben, MMM, Maro, Yamaguchi Takahiro, and Pharaoh in addition to Dengaryū and Young-G. According to Dengaryū, "We had more time than we knew what to do with, and no money. We could make music for free. We had no other possibilities."

stillichimiya, "Dacchi mo nee kō icchoshi," from *Saudade*

The group's raps often express pride in the area, using an ample dose of the regional Kōshū accent (e.g., "Dacchi mo nee kō icchoshi" [2006], a completely new track with a refrain drawn from a 1995 local hit). This local pride is also reflected in the music: e.g., all of the tracks on the 2009 EP, *Amaterasu Ichinomiya,* contains Japanese instruments, *kakegoe* calls, references to *matsuri* (festivals), quotes from *enka,* pentatonic melodies, and other sounds intended to invoke feelings of nostalgia.[7] Nonetheless, the songs also depict the hometown as being clearly in decline.

stillichimiya, "Momobatake" (Peach Fields, 2009)

A case in point is "Momobatake" (Peach Fields, 2009), whose track features a shamisen and a minor scale. According to Young-G, "During our town's festivals, the men from the neighborhood often ask us to perform live. But in the countryside, our reality is an aging society of grandpas and grandmas. So we decided to make songs that the elderly, too, could understand. We use Japanese rhythms of old and a chorus with an *enka*-like melody. That's 22nd-century hip-hop." (Young-G, interview, 2012)

The musical reference to *enka* seems befitting of the narrative of loss. The opening verse expresses pride in Ichinomiya's place as the leading peach grower in Japan and that there isn't a place that can match its beauty in April, when the peach trees are in bloom. But quickly the villagers speak of the difficulties facing them:

> へーもーかったるくてかなわんよーがと
>
> 儲からねーのに体ばかりくだびれて、
>
> 野良にいくのが嫌になって、あーあー跡継ぎもみつかんねー。
>
> しょうがねーらーへー年貢の納め時　今年で畑止めにしらだー . . .
>
> 向かいの畑も潰れた。そして隣の畑も諦めた。

て！残っているのはうちだけか。寂しい風が吹き抜けた。

The fields] don't serve for profits. Even though they don't make any profits, they just tire out my body. I came to dislike going to the fields. I couldn't find a successor. It couldn't be helped. The time has come. So I decided to give up the field this year.

The field opposite us went bankrupt, and the field next to us gave up.

Hey! Our field is the only one left. A lonely wind blows through.

—stillichimiya, "Momobatake" (2009)

The rappers then ask, "Is it all right for the fields to disappear and for buildings and malls to be built? . . . You can buy peaches at the grocer's, but tell me, where can you buy a field of blooming peach trees?"

Similarly, Dengaryū addressed the economic difficulties of the countryside in "Ice City" (*Sakuhinshū Just*, 2008), describing an environment where downtowns have been shuttered, and feckless youth spend their lives in roadside chain stores:

ない ない 何もない 夢も希望もチャンスもない

繁華街はシャッター街 漂う諦めムード 全開のHood

ないない 見出せない この街に価値観 見出せない

パチンコ 風俗 飲食 車 抜け落ちる文化 繋がれる首輪

病んだLocalバビロン歌う 回転寿司みたく 街が回る

国道沿いチェーン店の連立 気がつけば一日そこで成立

ドンキにTSUTAYAがホットスポット 惰性に生きる若者のFuct

諦めにPC 携帯とTalk 働いて 食って寝て 孤独

この病んだ状況 ここだけだけじゃねーら

地方の奴ら そっちはどうだ？

Nothing, nothing, there is nothing—no dream, no hope, no possibilities.

Downtown is a shuttered street; the mood is of giving up; the hood's completely open.

No, no, I can't see any sense of values in this town.

Pachinko, sex industry, eating and drinking, cars, disappearing culture, our collars are tied.

I'm singing of this sick Babylon,[8] a city spinning like revolving sushi.[9]

Chain stores line up along the national highway. One day before you've noticed, there's another one.

Don Quixote[10] and Tsutaya[11] are the hot places. Fucked youth are living in inertia.

Looking at PCs in resignation, talking on cell phones, working, eating, and sleeping in loneliness.

This city can't be the only place in this sick condition.

You guys in the regions, how is it out there?

—Dengaryū, "Ice City" (2008)

This blunt, unadorned vision of the hometown is also presented in *Saudade* (2010), a film directed by Tomita Katsuya, himself a native of Yamanashi Prefecture. The plot revolves around the economic hardships of temporary contract laborers in the dwindling construction industry of Yamanashi Prefecture, as well as the ethnically inflamed conflicts that develop among the Japanese and immigrant contingents, who (in this film) hail primarily from Brazil and Thailand.[12] Featured in the film is Dengaryū, who plays a contract worker and rapper whose hip-hop crew engages in a competition with a Japanese-Brazilian crew. The film, which won the Montgolfière d'Or grand prize from the Festival des 3 Continents in 2011, has gained a cult following in Japan for its realism. Its acclaim helped to raise Dengaryū's profile as a rapper.

Japan post-3.11: *Like a B-movie 2*

Back to the basic, 俺たちって何だ？Back to the basic 音楽って何だ？

政治って何だ？真実って何だ？絆って何だ？日本人って何だ？

愛って何だ？生きるって何だ？何だ？何だ？

Back to the basics: who are we? Back to the basics: what is music?

What is government? What is truth? What are human bonds? What does it mean to be Japanese?

What is love? What does it mean to live? What is it? What is it?

The stage at Dengaryū's solo show, WWW, Shibuya, August 30, 2012.

—Dengaryū, "Resurrection" (2012)

During 2011 when *Saudade* was gaining recognition, Dengaryū was working on his second album, *B kyū eiga no yōni 2.* (Like a B Movie 2, 2012). The album is framed around the concept of a B-movie:

> It's not as if I'm living an A-level kind of life. My life is more like a B-movie. B-movies have a certain flavor of their own. They're not brilliant, and you might even say, "What the hell is this?" But whoever makes them is doing their best to make them. They may be rubbish, but they're trying their damndest to make them. There are lots of great B movies. I personally like them. (Dengaryū, interview, 2012)

Short samples from B-movies and television shows, such as the British science-fiction television series *Thunderbirds* (1965–66) and the *yakuza* film *Jinji naki tatakai* (Battles Without Honor and Humanity, dir. Fukasaku Kinji, 1973) serve as transitions between individual tracks on the album. These tracks are vignettes that reveal Dengaryū's post-3.11 consciousness:

> After [the triple disaster of] March 11, I thought, what's going to happen to Japan? What do we need to do to make this country recover? I thought about these questions a lot, but there's no simple answer . . . I conceptualized that a nation is formed by the aggregation of individuals. The problems of the nation affect each individual. So I wanted to examine the mentality of individuals—their truths, their lies, their crimes. I focused on the viewpoint of individuals in order to reflect present-day society. What is necessary, from the point of view of each individual, in order to live? I wanted to analyze Japan's condition today—the micro and macro ideas, the very private thoughts, the large-scale issues—in my own manner and make music out of it. (Dengaryū, interview, 2012)

Hence, some songs address highly personal issues with universal themes, such as loneliness ("Lonely). "Happy Life" presents three familiar characters in Japanese society—a college student enjoying a last bit of hedonism, a freeter hanging out in convenience stores and clubs, and a salaryman leading a workaday life unappreciated by his boss or his wife. Dengaryū explains that none of these characters is truly happy, and that his underlying message is that one shouldn't take for granted the media's messages of what constitutes happiness but to take control of one's own life. And for all the despair expressed on the album (as noted below), it climaxes on an optimistic note with "Ano kane o narasu no wa ore" (I'm the One Who Rings that Bell), with its message of self-determination and hope. As several fans noted, "After all [the turbulence], it leaves you with a warm feeling . . . just like a movie."[13]

Political engagement

An arresting aspect of Dengaryū's album is the directness with which he expresses his feelings regarding the 3.11 disaster. His anger, presumably at the Nuclear Village—the tight-knit group of bureaucrats, politicians, and industry executives who allowed nuclear power to proliferate and are still pressing for the continuation of nuclear power—is perhaps at its rawest in "Panic Game." The third verse opens with the sounds of squealing tires, a car door slamming, and the muffled mumblings of someone apparently gagged. Dengaryū raps:

> あの宗教みたいに奴らを拉致って、大好きなプルトニウムお口にぶち込む。[Take this, motherfucker!
>
> お味の方はいかがでしょうか？Why so serious? 口裂いて笑わす。
>
> 一億3千万の怒りが生んだ気まぐれのモンスター、俺はお前だ。
>
> Abduct those guys like that religious cult, and ram the plutonium they so love down their throats.
>
> Take this, motherfucker!
>
> How does it taste? Why so serious? Tear their mouths and make them smile.[14]
>
> I'm the monster of whim, born of the anger of 130 million.[15]
>
> —Dengaryū, "Panic Game" (2012)

Dengaryū is apparently role-playing a fantasy of vigilante justice, kidnapping and torturing unnamed brokers of nuclear power, whom he accuses of being "tricksters who used the media." The track is clearly inspired by the Joker in the Batman film *The Dark Knight* (2008), but it also includes references to Slim Shady, American rapper Eminem's evil alter ego.[16] Indeed, the sound effects and premise of kidnapping (as well as voice-acting skill) remind this writer of two Eminem songs: the car sounds echo "'97 Bonnie and Clyde" (1998), while the narrative of verbal abuse and the threat of violence is reminiscent of "Kim" (2000).[17] Like "Kim," the verse ends chillingly. After the last line,

> 庶民 なめんな、これでもくらえ。
>
> Don't underestimate the common people. Eat this!

the musical background suddenly drops out, followed by the sound of an object hitting the floor; Dengaryū laughs, as if in the Joker persona.

A less visceral but equally direct response is "Ai no teema" (Theme of Love). A melancholy track is interspersed with a commentary that is made to sound like a call-in talk radio show:

今年の言葉が絆です、とこれ見た瞬間で私は、ああ、その自分勝手で冷酷で居るか、日本人に。偽善て言う事まで加わったと。。。

From the moment I saw, "The word of this year is 'kizuna' (human bonds)," I thought, is it enough to call the Japanese selfish and cold-blooded? Things had reached the point where the adjective "hypocritical" must also be added. . .

この一年間の震災の後の動きは、もう、どう考えても、日本人は根本的にだめだって言う事を証明した。。。これだけ大きな大震災があって、でそれを助けようとしない。つまり、日本人は非常に冷酷選民になってて、自己的で、現状の分析がちゃんとできない民族だって言う事が、まあ、表明された訳ですね。

No matter how one thinks about what has happened in this year since the earthquake, it proved that the Japanese are fundamentally useless. . . Such a big earthquake, and they don't try to help. In other words, it showed that the Japanese have become cold-blooded elitists, a selfish race that cannot properly analyze the present situation.

--Dengaryū, "Ai no teema" (2012)

This track serves as the lead-in to "Straight Outta 138." The title contains multiple references—Los Angeles rap crew NWA's "Straight Outta Compton" (1988); National Highway 138, which runs through Yamanashi Prefecture; and Dengaryū's hometown, represented as a Japanese reading of the number, Ichimiya. One sleepless night, Dengaryū sent a long email to Young-G describing a rap of all the things that angered him about the Japanese system. After Young-G laid down the beats, Dengaryū recorded two verses where he spits out these frustrations: the lack of opportunities, self-serving politicians ("You always say, 'it's for the country,' but it's for yourselves, you traitors"), the media serving as propaganda, the outdated entertainment law (*fūeihō*) that is shutting down nightclubs, the inflexibility of the educational system, and the dependent posture toward the United States, among other issues. He quickly came up with the refrain:

俺は言うこと聞くようなおめこじゃね～ぞ。

Ore wa yūkoto kikuyōna omeko ja neezo

I'm not the kind of cunt who'll listen to what you say.

The line is a harsher variation of the veteran rapper ECD's refrain, where the common words are shown underlined:

言うこと聞くような奴らじゃねーぞ。

Yūkoto kikuyōna yatsura ja neezo.

We're not the kind of guys who'll listen to what you say.

This line had originated in a retort from a protester who was being arrested at a demonstration against the war in Iraq in 2003. Having overheard it, ECD developed it into a full-length rap and performed it at post-demonstration parties; it became the anthem of antiwar protests that year. Dengaryū had seen videos of ECD's performances from this period. Recognizing the *hommage*, he invited ECD to write the final verse for the track.

I thought it would be interesting to have him in my song because he is of a different generation—he is twenty years older than me—and his way of thinking is completely different. . . And the resulting lyric was so persuasive. It made me think, "He's totally right." It made me think about how I am going to live in the future, and it encouraged me. It's the kind of collaboration that you have to do. (Dengaryū, interview, 2012)

As ECD was busy at the time recording his own album (as well as working and caring for a family), the two rappers did not meet in a studio but instead exchanged recordings over the Internet. A frequent participant in antinuclear demonstrations, ECD fashioned a verse that was a call to action among citizens. This stance is made clear in his revision to the original refrain:

言うこと聞かせる番だ、俺たちが

Yūkoto kikaseru ban da, oretachi ga

It's our turn to make them listen to what we say.

ECD's verse is crammed with urgent, provocative appeals ("If we stay silent, we'll be killed") and references to both the present situation and the past. Referring to the radiation from the Fukushima accident that has made areas of northeastern Japan uninhabitable, he echoes many Japanese citizens' fears that radiation will eventually compromise people's health and that another accident could happen elsewhere. He expresses his anger toward the disdain conservative factions show to antinuclear protesters, quoting the *hikokumin* (traitor) insult that they hurl at demonstrators. ECD also underlines his alarm by tying the nuclear situation to World War II, suggesting nuclear energy feeds the power fantasies of older politicians. But as he indicates ("the situation resembles something"), he is also drawing a parallel between the war and the nuclear crisis. During World War II, the media, which was controlled by the military government, disseminated *daihon'ei happyō* (official announcements from Imperial Headquarters), which minimized reported damage and even reported military defeats as victories. Today, the term means a completely untrustworthy official announcement; many Japanese, including ECD himself, use it to describe the official announcements from the government and Tokyo Electric Power (TEPCO) on the nuclear crisis (ECD, interview with the author, 2011). Hence, ECD is saying that the officials' obfuscation of the dangers of nuclear power and the accident mirror the military's handling of information during World War II. Most of all, ECD calls for citizens to make their voices heard—"sign petitions, vote, demonstrate." It's a call that needs reinforcement in a country where according to surveys in mid-2012, 90 percent of citizens wanted no nuclear power, yet the government has been moving toward restarting nuclear power plants.

いうこというこというこというこということ聞かせる番だ俺たちが。

黙ったまんまじゃ殺される、

国が 人の住めない土地に変えたんだ。。。

人が死ぬのをわかってやめない。

反対すると非国民あつかい。

なんかに似てる、とにかく狂ってる。

67年前のボロ負けで 終わったはずのあの戦争を

続けたかったやつらの夢。

それが原発だ間違いねー 。だからもうとっくの時代おくれ。

署名投票デモンストレーション、

いうこと聞かせる番だ俺たちが。

It's our turn to make them listen to what we say.

If we stay silent, we'll be killed.

The nation has converted the land to be uninhabitable by humans. . .

They know people will die, but they won't stop.

If you oppose [nuclear power], they treat you like traitors.

The situation resembles something—anyway, it's crazy.

It's the dream of those guys who wanted to keep fighting that war

that should have ended with our crushing defeat sixty-seven years ago.

That's nuclear power; no doubt about it. It was already outdated long ago. . .

Sign petitions, vote, demonstrate.

It's our turn to make them listen to what we say.

—"Straight Outta 138," Dengaryū, ECD's verse (2012)

This call for greater political participation among citizens is also expressed in Dengaryū's "Senkyo ni ikō" (Let's Go Vote, 2012), which he released a few days before the recent Lower House election. As he explains,

> There are surprisingly few people who have been communicating their opinions. . . I think what's important is that people have their own opinions. It doesn't matter if the opinion is right or wrong. To make public one's opinion takes much courage. By having an opinion about one issue, you'll enlighten yourself and others. I think that's the most important aspect. . . I want to represent truthfully the opinions of young people. I want them to grow into the sort of people who, when they reach a point when they must ask themselves, "What are we going to do?" they are able to say, "Let's follow this path," in their own way. There's too little expression of one's own opinions. (Dengaryū, interview, 2012)

The rap outlines several reasons why citizens, and young people in particular, should overcome their apathy and vote. Dengaryū notes that "Japan's fortunes are sinking" and that the country is "in a dangerous position." He then encourages young people to vote, because politicians will make a series of dangerous decisions while one isn't paying attention, pointing out that not voting is the same as giving a vote to a bad politician. He also encourages people to vote on their own opinions rather than the recommendations of organized groups:

ちょっとお前、選挙どうすんの？

あそこの何何さん、内に仕事くれるから

お前あの党に一票。

地方によくある、これは組織票。

ちょっと待って、少し考えて。

そのマニフェスト君は知ってる？

マジで危険な事言ってる。

可能性、大有り、チェックしろ、 everybody。

考えずに入れたその一票、

未来の人たち苦しめるかも。

きらきら輝く子供の未来、

陰らしゃいけない、大人の責任。

Hey you, how are you voting in the election?

That guy—he's going to give us work,

So you vote for that party.

This is organized voting; there's a lot of it in the regions.

Wait a minute! Think a little.

Do you know that party's platform?

Everybody, check it out. It's very likely that

That vote you cast without much thought

May cause suffering for the people of the future.

It is the adult's responsibility to make sure

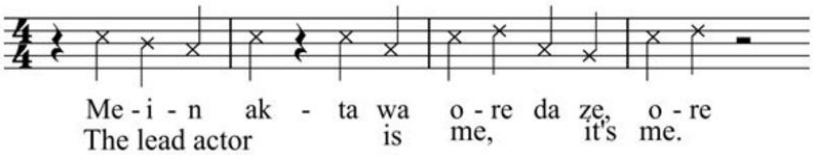
We don't darken the brightly shining future of children.

—Dengaryū, "Senkyo ni ikō"

It is worth noting that in "Senkyo ni ikō," Dengaryū is not telling his listeners *how* to vote, but simply *to vote*; as he explains, "I think the smoothest approach [to political activity in hip-hop] is to take something that is a bit difficult, chew on it in your head, and deliver it in an easy-to-understand way through music. Taking care that you avoid putting too much of your own impressions in the song, but you still communicate what needs to be communicated." Nonetheless, he seems willing to help some causes: "It's a strange era. If what you are thinking is the same as what I'm thinking, I'd say, let's work alone, and with each other, and do our best. I'd be delighted if a bit of something becomes material for someone else." (Dengaryū, interview, 2012)

"Mad pop" music

Another aspect that has helped Dengaryū's appeal is the musicality of the background tracks. Young-G has drawn them from an admirable variety of sources—*enka*, traditional music, psychedelic rock, jazz, classic hip-hop, and symphonic soundtracks, as well as movie clips, in keeping with the album's theme. The two of them are particularly skilled at creating catchy choruses: with its repeated words, simple melody, and background vocals, the chorus for "Lonely" invites audiences to sing along. But equally, choruses that are not sung draw in the audience. For example, "Ano kane o narasu no wa ore" consists of the simple chord sequence, /Db-Eb-/Fm---/Db-Cm7-/Fm---/,[18] with loops recurring throughout the song—synthesizer lines of various timbres, plucked and bowed violins, and drums. With these few materials, Young-G effectively modulates the pacing of the verses, choosing among these loops to best accompany Dengaryū's lyrics; e.g., he cuts out much of the track at the beginning of the second verse as Dengaryū addresses his mother, and in the middle of the third verse at the words, "All the world is in slow motion." To lead more dramatically into the chorus, the track is first made *tacit*, followed by a fat /F-G-/ pickup on brass-like synthesizers that build to the *tutti* climax of a memorable chorus. Over this track, Dengaryū raps musically, using higher pitch to emphasize words (e.g., "BA-ka daze," "hip-hop ni ni-a-UU"). In the final line of the chorus, he stresses the key word "ore" (I) on downbeats, driving home the message of the song:



The song is very effective in live performance, where it evokes an excited reaction from the crowd, who shout along to the chorus.

Similarly, "Senkyo ni ikō" features the catchy loop from Gang Starr's "Words I Manifest"[19] (1989), itself sampled from Charlie Parker and Miles Davis' "Night in Tunisia" (1946), to which Dengaryū and Young-G have added a catchy chorus that invites the listener to sing along.

Dengaryū says of this catchiness: "We want to make something that is both bad[20] and pop. For example, if you make something that's a bit too hardcore, it becomes difficult to communicate a message, wasting your rebel gesture. It might be better to make it poppy in order to increase that music's ability to communicate—make it mad pop." He points to veteran hip-hop group Scha Dara Parr as masters of this ability to combine catchy music with thoughtful, comprehensible lyrics.

It is also this combination of infectious music with conscious lyrics—so relevant to Japan today, and delivered in a raw, passionate style —that makes Dengaryū a notable presence in hip-hop. While being personally rooted in his rural community, he speaks of a socio-economic marginality that resonates with the experiences of youth throughout Japan, many of whom have faced difficulties finding satisfying employment. His frank assessment of post-3.11 Japan is not only an expression of anger and despair; it is also coupled with calls for people to participate actively in their future, beginning with expressing one's own opinions. And as we enter into another period of LDP rule, we wonder with Dengaryū whether hip-hop—an important voice for the Japanese outsider—will take a further turn to nationalistic conservatism or if its stance as "rebel music" will prevail.

Interviews

Dengaryū and Young-G, conversation with the author, Tokyo, August 30, 2012.

_____, interview with the author, Tokyo, December 21, 2012.

ECD, interview with the author, Tokyo, December 22, 2011.

____, conversation with the author, Tokyo, July 29, 2012.

Discography

Dengaryū. *Sakuhinshū Just.* 2008. Tōgen Hibiki Records.

Dengaryū. *B kyū eiga no yōni 2.* 2012. Mary Joy Recordings, MJCD-059.

Stillichimiya. *One Peach.* 2006. Tōgen Hibiki Records.

_____. *Amaterasu Ichinomiya*. 2009. Mary Joy Recordings, MJCD-049.

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Recommended citation: Noriko Manabe, "Straight Outta Ichimiya: The Appeal of a Rural Japanese Rapper," The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 11, Issue 5, No. 1, February 4, 2013.*

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[1] Urata Takeshi and Futatsugi Shin, "[Tokushū] Besuto arubamu 2012: Rappu/Hippu Hoppu (Nihon)," *Myūjikku Magajin* (January 2013).

[2] MPC0306, August 9, 2012, "2012 nen saikō no sakuhin," comment on "B kyū eiga no yōni," Amazon.co.jp.

[3] Several rappers, like Zeebra and Seeda, currently record, or have previously recorded, under major labels. Other rap groups have recorded on subsidiary labels of major record companies; e.g., Scha Dara Parr and Rhymester came to prominence in the 1990s while recording for Ki-oon Records and File Records, both subsidiary labels of Sony. It is worth noting that four of Urata and Futatsugi's top five hip-hop albums were recorded on independent labels, while the fifth was recorded on P-Vine, a long-running small label wholly owned by the CATV/Satellite channel Space Shower Networks. Underground hip-hop records are typically discussed on blogs and web magazines, then audiophile magazines like *Music Magazine*; they are distributed over the Internet and in large record stores such as Tower Records Japan, which continues to be an important outlet for underground music in Japan.

[4] This stage name is based on the sound of the Chinese-style reading of the artist's birth name, 田村隆 ("Den-son-ryū")。

[5] A trackmaker is a person who assembles the background musical track to a hip-hop song.

[6] "Dengaryū: B kyū eiga no yōni 2," interview by Yūtaman, Riddim Online, June 6, 2012.

[7] They do not include quotes of local traditional melodies *per se,* but are meant to invoke their memory. (Young-G, interview)

[8] Babylon is a Rastafari term describing an oppressive institution or system.

[9] A reference to *kaiten sushi-ya*—a cheap restaurant where sushi is served on a revolving conveyor belt.

[10] Discount store chain.

[11] DVD/CD retail and rental chain.

[12] There are also references to a Chinese migrant population in stillichimiya and Dengaryū's tracks. Dengaryū's "Ramen" (2008) features a Chinese-sounding musical track and the words, "Xie xie," while stillichimiya's "Yabee ikiyoi de sugee moriagaru" (2012) contains the words, 我口漫游一官地区，你口一起来吧。

[13] MPC0306, op.cit.; see also DJ Homerun, "'B kyū eiga no yōni 2' o kiita," April 11, 2012.

[14] In *Dark Knight*, the Joker recounts that he scarred his own face into a permanent smile.

[15] The population of Japan.

[16] Shady is named in the first verse.

[17] In Eminem's "'97 Bonnie and Clyde" (1998), the protagonist loads the body of his murdered wife into the trunk of a car and

dumps it into a lake, all the while talking to his toddler daughter; the track contains many car-related sounds. "Kim" (2000) is its prequel, in which he shouts verbal abuse to his wife and murders her. See Steen K. Nielsen, "Wife Murder as Child's Game," *Danish Yearbook of Musicology* 34 (2007): 31–46, for an analysis of Eminem's songs.

[18] The "/" is indicative of a measure bar, while each chord symbol or "-" is indicative of a quarter note.

[19] In the rap, Dengaryū takes advantage of the multiple meanings of "manifesuto" in Japanese: a political party's platform as well as a declaration.

[20] i.e., good.

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